



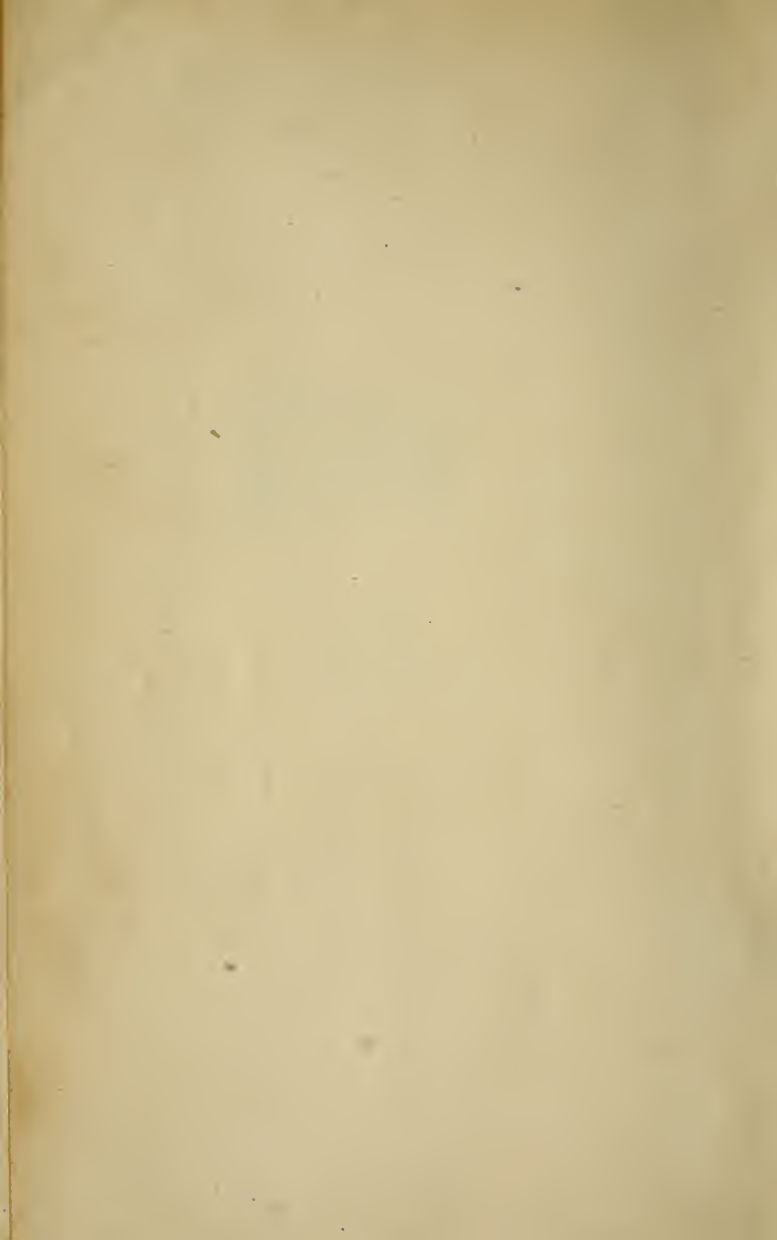


LIBRARY  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF ILLINOIS

823  
D2862f

v.

A. M. Wagner



# FATHER GODFREY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ANNE DYSART,” “ARTHUR,”

&c., &c.

‘La religion, la société, la nature, telles sont les trois luttes de l’homme.’

*Les Travailleurs de Mer.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1873.

*The right of Translation is reserved.*

LONDON:

PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,  
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

823  
D2862f  
v.3

# FATHER GODFREY.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### THE FLY-WHEEL STOPS.

FREDERICK GODFREY did not pay a visit again to Mrs. Foxley's for some time. But one day, happening to meet the mother and daughter together in the street, he was struck by the dejected, deprecating look in Elfrida's face.

"It seems a long time since we saw you, Mr. Godfrey," said Mrs. Foxley, pleasantly. She fancied that perhaps he had not liked to come so frequently without an invitation.

Again, as he answered, he caught the appealing look in Elfrida's wonderful blue eyes.

"I will come to-night," he said—"I feared to come too often, Mrs. Foxley."

"Come to tea, then," she said, quite confirmed in her notion with regard to his absence.

When he arrived that same evening, Elfrida was alone—in her customary seat in the high-backed chair by the fire. The gas was not lit, but there was a bright blaze lighting up the little parlour, which never looked so well as at night, with its quaint furniture, rich, time-mellowed colouring, and look of home comfort and woman's care. It was so different from the aspect of forlorn bachelorhood presented by the priest's tasteless little apartment.

Elfrida came forward to meet him as he

entered the room, and as he took her proffered hand, she said, and there were tears in her voice, if not in her eyes,

“Are you angry with me, Mr. Godfrey? Have I done anything wrong?”

“Angry!—you done anything wrong! Forgive me, Miss Foxley, but you distress me by such questions. How could I reasonably be angry with you?”

He saw her face brighten. It was like the passing away of a cloud from a radiant landscape.

“I am so glad,” she said, and the nervous laugh betrayed the immensity of the relief she experienced. “I have been feeling as if it was all dark and doubtful with me again. It was so dreadful for me to think that you would perhaps frown on me like Miss Blagrove and the Rector—that nowhere could I find peace. But you will help me,

won't you? Your—our Church is not harsh. Only guide me, and I will do all you bid."

She spoke fast, as if excited. Her eyes were raised to his face. She hung upon his utterance as if it were that of a god. Frederick Godfrey almost staggered under that look.

Words could scarcely express the relief it was when, at that very instant, Mrs. Foxley came into the room. It seemed like a Divine intervention. That had certainly been the maddest, most horrible moment of his life!

Again he thought, in the struggles of the night which succeeded, he must withdraw himself from Elfrida. But how to do it? Would it even be right to leave her a prey to the despondency—perhaps religious despair, from which it appeared he alone could snatch her. Was it not, even as a

priest, his duty to be anathema for his flock's sake? Would not God keep him pure and firm, if he were only faithful?

He would confess to-morrow. Yes, the Church was right. This neglect of her behests it was which had brought upon him this terrible trial. But the routine way in which his confession would be received by his common-minded brother at the other church! That it was which discouraged him.

Suddenly he took a resolution. He would go to the Professor, who had been his confidant in his old trials. He would go to-morrow. He would not see Elfrida again till he had some counsel more trustworthy than his own heart could give. But when to-morrow came, of course, as he might have known, in a common-sense frame of mind, he could not go; nor for many days to come. But though a man of passionate

nature, Frederick Godfrey was not, in an ordinary sense, impulsive. What he had determined, even in moments of passion, he generally did. All his feelings were of a permanent character.

In the afternoon, after a long day's journey, he arrived at the Professor's house. How well he remembered the last time he had been there! That bright Summer day, which had changed his whole existence—the strange, dream-like misery which had possessed his soul as the lark sang in the blue sky, and the flowers glittered in the sunshine! Now it was a raw, sullen Winter afternoon—a leaden sky, a colourless world, from which life and joy had departed. The misery was dream-like no longer, but most real; oppressive, unlovely, like the day. The change which had then seemed tragical, mighty as the future seems to all

men, was now part and parcel of the commonplace present, full of petty details and vulgar cares.

The trials of that new life had been quite as numerous as he expected; but of a very different nature—far less heroic, far more mean and perplexing.

He knocked at the Professor's door. After some delay it was opened by an elderly woman. He could hear her unfasten the chain, and draw back the bolts. As he expected, the Professor was not at home; but he had been prepared for that.

“When does Mr. Blank return?”

“Not for a long time, sir. He have gone to Rome, to see the Holy Father himself, they do say.” And the woman crossed herself, and spoke in an awe-struck tone.

“It is not to be,” said Godfrey to himself, as he turned away from the door. Oh, if

there was only anyone with whom he might take counsel!

But there was no one, and he fell back, perhaps from habit, on the old Protestant notion that a man's best counsellor is that sense of rectitude and charity which dwells within the bosom of all who honestly seek not their own will, but God's. At all events, he could not leave the matter in the hands of stupid, formal, passionless Father Paul, who represented at Smokeham the infallibility of the Church.

Then he assured himself again of the logical and historical perfection of the whole system. If there was an external authority, and that he had long ago conceded that there must be, here it was! But he did not go to Father Paul, and he went nearly if not quite as often to Mrs. Foxley's. He did this the more readily that no such moment

as that which had so nearly overcome him, occurred again. Elfrida was placid and happy, at times almost sprightly. It was the sweetest sensation of power he had ever experienced, to know that at will he could draw forth from her super-sensitive feelings responsive chords of trust and joy. It was, he knew, a great responsibility; but he would guard her innocent soul from all breath of evil. He might suffer himself; but to have given her tender spirit rest on earth, and opened to it a prospect of happiness in heaven, was worth the martyrdom of a life.

And if it should thus be given him to save a soul, would it not cover a multitude of sins?

Poor Frederick Godfrey! What were the labours of Hercules, or of any untiring modern money-seeker or fame-seeker, at

whose labours those of Hercules sink into child's play, in comparison with that which he now undertook? What were the conquests of Alexander or Napoleon, or the victories of Bismarck and Moltke, in comparison with that never-ending, still beginning daily battle, not with sin only, but with the whole of his human nature, in which he proposed to come off victorious? It might be bravely, but was it wisely done?

The time passed—that old orthodox Christmas; and the new year stole in on the snow with silent footsteps. The bells pealed as usual, low and muffled for the dying sovereign; with a loud, rejoicing clang for the new monarch. “*Le roi est mort; vive le roi!*” A raw, damp, dismal January succeeded to the frost-bound Christmas. Elfrida was happier and more useful, her mother said, than she had ever been since she was grown

up. To Mrs. Foxley herself, it was almost as the after Summer of her life. Under the system of fostering indulgence recommended by the priest, the soft amiabilities of her daughter's character began to blossom. Of course, the burden of the work fell to Mrs. Foxley; and the lion's share of the ease, and such amusement as it afforded, to her daughter; but the latter was happy and grateful, and her mother asked no more. All this was the doing of Mr. Godfrey. Even Mrs. Foxley acknowledged it. Who should say it was not well done?

One afternoon, in the month of February, Mrs. Foxley had walked out to Belvidere Mansion, at once to call on Mrs. Higginson, and to show her some patterns for the drawing-room chairs at Willesmere Court. Although frequently invited, and even pressed, she declined all further hospitality than the

cup of tea or glass of wine bestowed on these occasions. Elfrida never accompanied her mother. She shrank at all times from miscellaneous society, and more especially from the style of society she supposed she should meet at Belvidere Mansion.

The Foxleys drank tea at about five o'clock. Elfrida had been out on some little errands of charity of her own ; and when she returned in the dusk, she expected to find her mother already at home, with their pretty little tea-service on the table, and the kettle singing on the hob ; for although without Mrs. Foxley's talents for bestowing on everything she had to do with, a look of comfort and attractiveness, Elfrida, when not engrossed by subjective miseries, was very susceptible of such influences. She felt, therefore, a little disappointed, and even a little depressed, on entering their quaint

little parlour, furnished with the ancient oak furniture, and the curtains in marvellous birds, which had been brought from Willesmere Court, to find the fire nearly out, the hearth strewn with ashes, and a sort of general littery, dusty look the room never had when Mrs. Foxley was at home. But all at once it struck Elfrida as at the same time an inspiration and a comfort, that for once she would make it look comfortable, and get the tea ready for her mother, as her mother had so often done for her. She knew it would make her happy; and had not Father Godfrey told her that the very soul and secret of happiness for oneself was to be thinking of something not oneself? Filled with this magnanimous thought, and with the thought a little less magnanimous, of the look of approbation she should obtain when she should tell him of the success of his

recipe (for of course it would succeed—was not the priest infallible?), Elfrida mended the fire, swept the hearth, and rang for the maid to bring the tea. Everything really began to look very nice, and quite a glow of conscious virtue filled her little head. Wonderful, infallible Priest!

At last it was all ready. But still Mrs. Foxley did not come, and Elfrida began to be apprehensive that the tea would have stood too long, and that that clear glow in the grate would have consumed itself to ashes again before she came back. It was really getting almost dark. But she would not light the gas.

“I should fancy it were quite dark, if the gas were lighted,” thought Elfrida, who, now that there was nothing more to do, began to get a little anxious.

At last there was a knock at the door,

and nothing doubting it was Mrs. Foxley, Elfrida ran to open it.

“Miss Foxley!” said the voice of the priest, in a surprised tone. He could just see her, for she had her face to all that remained of the daylight, whereas his countenance was hidden in the shadow, and he felt glad that it was.

“I thought you were mamma. I wonder what can keep her.”

She conducted Mr. Godfrey to the sitting-room, and explained where her mother had gone.

“I will go and meet her,” he said at once. Then Elfrida told him how she herself had been employed, but she did not obtain the word of approbation she had expected. He seemed to be thinking of something else. All at once, in the firelight, he caught her eye fixed on him with a disappointed, beseeching look.

“I will soon bring her home,” he said, mistaking the cause of her dejection ; “don’t be so uneasy ;” and he smiled on her with tender, pitying eyes.

“What a loving little heart she has !” he thought, “and what a rude, hard world for one so fearful !”

It seemed to Frederick Godfrey as if no one but himself would ever understand Elfrida. Even Leigh Wynford had wholly mistaken her. Elfrida sat down, comforted by his look. She did not feel anxious now. He had said all would be well ; and so, of course, all would be well. Soon she heard footsteps at the door, and she ran once more to open it. Mrs. Foxley was leaning on the priest’s arm.

“Here is your dear mother,” he said, “but she is very tired.”

“I thought I should never have got

home," Mrs. Foxley said, seating herself on the first chair she came to. "I had to stop to rest so often by the way. I was so thankful to see Mr. Godfrey. Elfrida, go up to my dressing-box, and you will find a little flask of brandy. There is no wine in the house, and I feel as if I must have something."

Elfrida did as she was told, and as soon as Mrs. Foxley had swallowed a little brandy and water, she said she was better, and would lie down on the sofa. Frederick Godfrey noticed that she shivered.

"It is only fatigue. I am getting too old for such long walks."

But Mr. Godfrey drew Elfrida aside.

"I will go for a doctor," he said. "I am sure your mother is ill."

Elfrida's eyes opened wide with alarm. That her mother could be ill, and that all at

once she should become the responsible person, seemed hardly in the nature of things.

In the meantime a bright crimson spot had appeared on Mrs. Foxley's cheek, and she began to complain of a pain in her side.

When the doctor came, he said she had a great deal of fever, and that her complaint was violent congestion of the lungs, from cold and fatigue. All this Elfrida listened to, for of course he addressed her, with a face pained and bewildered, her large, appealing eyes turning from her mother to the priest, and then from the priest back to her mother. But the fly-wheel of the Foxley mechanism had stopped. Mrs. Foxley was too ill now to offer any help, and the priest felt as if it were hardly his place to remain.

The doctor, a good, honest man in his way, but a stern evangelical, knew him by sight, and evidently regarded his presence with disfavour.

“ I will call in the morning,” he said, “ to hear how Mrs. Foxley is.”

“ Oh, don’t go !” Elfrida cried, imploringly, with a quick gesture of supplication. Her lip trembled with eagerness, and large tears stood in her eyes.

“ I must go,” he answered, abruptly ; and with a slight salutation to the doctor, who thought him the most unfeeling man he had ever met, he hurried away, but not before he had seen Elfrida’s countenance fall dismally.

All the way down the cold, dimly-lighted street, that wounded look haunted him ; and he hardly knew whether he felt most remorse for the pain he had given, or for the feeling which had forced him to give it.

## CHAPTER II.

A FEBRUARY MORNING.

FREDERICK GODFREY had walked fast on quitting Mrs. Foxley; but before he reached the Chapel of the Holy Cross he relaxed his pace. It seemed to him as if he could not bear to return to his lonely, comfortless lodgings, with no companion but his own miserable thoughts. Prayers, penances, fastings, were not these the means by which it behoved him to work out his own salvation from the temptation which assailed him? But suddenly his faith

in prayers, penances, and fastings seemed to forsake him utterly.

His whole being yearned for human affection. One word of sympathy and encouragement, warm from a heart which belonged to him, seemed then the only medicine for his sick soul. Oh, for one hour of home as in the old days! But the gulf which divided him from home had never looked so impassable.

He was now in the little paved path which led to his lodging. It was raining fast. The evening in that dreary room would be so long, and so full of pain; for his old zeal for study seemed lately to have forsaken him. He was beginning to ascend the stairs with a slow, dejected step, unlike his usual alert manner, when his landlady issued forth from her kitchen, with a red face; a flat iron in her hand.

“Please, your Reverence, I took the liberty, sir, knowing as you would excuse me, and as you said as how you wasn’t coming in till late, to ask a lady into the room, it rained so hard, and the kitchen was so hot, and the children a-making of a noise as ’ud ha’ made the deaf man hear. I hope as how you’ll excuse me, sir.”

“You must take me into the kitchen, then,” he said, gently, “till the lady is gone.”

But as the sound of his voice reached the listening ears upstairs, the door of his little room opened, and in the faint glimmer of firelight which came from within, he could just see the outline of a young female figure. Like a tremulous whisper arising out of the darkness, he heard—or did he only fancy he heard?—his own name :

“Frederick !”

His heart gave one huge leap. Almost at a single bound, he sprang up the steps which separated them.

“Who is it?—for God’s sake, who is it?”

“Dear—dear Frederick, I am Nelly!”

“Nelly!—my sister Nelly!”

He held both her hands in a tight clasp, and as he led her into the room he burst into tears.

Helen looked into his face. What he must have suffered! How cruel they had been! But being a Godfrey, she could not say this. She could only show it by the unwonted tenderness of her caresses, and by a certain air of penitence, which touched his heart as no reproaches would have done.

“Oh, Nelly!” he said, and for a time he could say no more, but only hold her hand and look into her face. But words came at

last, and hurried histories of home ; and then Frederick Godfrey saw how it all was, and how Helen had supplied his place—how she had been to his mother son and daughter, to the boys both brother and sister. His own life, with all its sacrifice and all its pain, looked poor and pale beside hers. Whom had he comforted ? Whom had he upheld ?

Suddenly he rose, and began to walk about the room. His thoughts had returned to the Foxleys. An eager desire was in his heart—a desire which at that moment looked like a hope of salvation. He hardly knew how to begin. Helen sat looking at him, and wondering. At last he asked abruptly :

“ Did you ever hear Mrs. Higginson mention Miss—Mrs. Foxley ? ”

“ Yes. I think they are working some-

thing for her ; or stay, was not the place the Higginsons have bought in the country once the property of the Foxleys ?”

“Yes, you are quite right.” And then Frederick told her how Mrs. Foxley had been that very afternoon at Mrs. Higginson’s, and how ill she had come home. He described the distress and friendlessness of her daughter, adding : “If Mrs. Higginson, as she is a kind woman, would let you go to-morrow to see them, it would be an act of the greatest charity. It would be a thousand times better than my going.”

“I will go—certainly. I am sure she will let me, if there is nothing infectious.” Helen’s face grew bright and eager with that gladness to help which made so strong a part of her character. But all at once that happy light was replaced by an uneasy look. “But how do you know the Fox-

leys, Frederick?" For she seemed to remember, if she had not dreamt it, some story she had heard about Miss Foxley and a priest, she could not quite recall what.

Now, as he did not answer immediately, she continued—

"I am sure, I am quite sure, I have heard you so much blamed about Miss Foxley; but of course you can explain it all. People are so prejudiced," she added, in a tone of indignation, a little wonderful, were it not that it is not so very uncommon to be indignant with others for the errors we have ourselves just ceased to commit.

"God bless you, Nelly, for believing in me!" But as he said this he could not forget how, once or twice, his ecclesiastical conscience had reproached him for not acting in the very way that to Helen appeared so wrong. How was it? It seemed to him

now as if it would have been wrong too. But he had not time then to trace to its cause this uncertainty of moral vision. He gave Helen, as far as his own agency was concerned, an exact account of the conversion of Miss Foxley, and of the manner in which her mother's consent had been obtained.

Helen listened with implicit faith and entire relief. She would tell the Higginsons the instant she returned. The matter should be set in a right light at once. And now she remembered that the Higginsons might be getting uneasy at her unusual absence.

With innumerable "Laws!" and "Well, to be sures!" Mrs. Higginson listened to the tale Miss Godfrey had to tell on her return.

"I thought poor Mrs. Foxley looked tired. To think of her being as hill as all that! I will horder a 'amper of jellies and

things to be sent at once. And who would have thought of your brother being a priest, and your finding 'im hout in this way? I 'ope as he won't make a pervert of you, my dear, as he have done of that poor Miss Foxley. They say as their cunning ways his beyond hanything—that nobody can hescape them."

"He will never make a convert of me, I promise you, Mrs. Higginson; and my brother is not cunning. I will explain to you all about Miss Foxley. She insisted on being a Roman Catholic." And Helen eagerly told the true tale of her conversion.

Mrs. Higginson returned no answer, but when she talked the matter over with her husband, she said,

"I don't 'alf like it, I can tell you. She is a nice girl, but it his has well she is soon going. Depend upon it, this Mr. Godfrey is

just like the rest of 'em. I see he is a-talking over his sister already, and made her believe he is as innocent as a lamb. A wolf hin sheep's clothing hi take it. And all that he 'as told her habout Miss Foxley, who would believe but herself?"

The paper-bag maker laughed, and regarded his wife with a sort of pride, as if he had not given her credit for being so clever.

"Miss Godfrey may certainly go to this poor sick woman ; but remember the priest must never darken our doors. I'll have none of that kind of cattle coming about here," said Mr. Higginson, with an aspect of the supremest contempt.

So licensed, Helen, after lessons the following day, set off to Smokeham. She had been preceded by the hamper, and Elfrida had been apprised of her coming, and was anxiously expecting her.

Helen looked round the quaint little room into which she was shown with a feeling of interest. It presented, certainly, a strong contrast to the splendour and luxury of Belvidere Mansion, yet about its faded antiquity there was a degree of pathos, and even beauty, which appealed forcibly to all her associations. She had, however, but little time to make comparisons, for Elfrida quickly joined her. She was quite startled by her beauty. The glow of relief with which she had heard of Helen's arrival had given that force of expression to her loveliness which, except in moments of feeling, it sometimes wanted. She clutched at Helen's extended hand, and looked appealingly in her helpful face, handsome, too, at this moment, in the warmth of its admiration, even beside the more ideal beauty of Elfrida's. There was something winning to

Helen in the confidence which this wonderfully lovely girl seemed at once to repose in her. Had she been a heaven-sent messenger, Elfrida could hardly have hailed her advent with greater joy. And was she not a heaven-sent messenger? Did she not come from Father Godfrey?

Her mother, she said, was very ill. "But I think she will improve now you are come," she added, and a more contented look came into her countenance. It was such a relief at all times to poor Elfrida to be delivered from the painful position of being a rational and responsible being.

It seemed to Helen Godfrey that Mrs. Foxley was very ill, though how ill, she was too young and inexperienced fully to understand. Her breathing was much laboured, and occasionally she appeared to sleep. After one of these slumbers, she

asked, evidently in the full possession of her faculties, and with her eyes fixed on Helen :

“ Who are you, my dear ? ”

“ I am Helen Godfrey,” she said, coming close to the invalid, and speaking softly. Mrs. Foxley appeared to look earnestly at her.

“ I like you,” she said. “ You have a kind face.”

Helen felt that she could have said the same to her. Bending down, she kissed her. The action was expressive of her feelings.

“ You are a Roman Catholic too, I suppose ? ” And the invalid’s tone was regretful.

“ Oh, no !—oh dear, no ! ”

“ Will you be a friend to my poor Elfrida ? ” asked Mrs. Foxley, eagerly. “ She is a tender, clinging child. I might have

been gentler to her, like my poor Geoffrey. I see it now. Will you, my dear?"

"I will—I will indeed!"

"Your brother is very good; but she wants a friend of her own sex; and he is a priest."

A troubled, anxious expression settled upon Mrs. Foxley's face. Oh, if he had only not been a priest! But the weight and the puzzle of her thoughts were too great for her weary brain. With a deep sigh, the burden seemed to fall from her, as if she were too feeble to retain it.

"Read something to me," she said to Helen—"something comforting. Sit by me, Elfrida, and hold my hand. My child, it will do you no harm to listen."

"Oh! mother," cried the poor child, trembling all over as she placed herself on the bed with a wild, dismayed face. A

dreadful idea had for the first time presented itself to her mind. That past wherein she had been so unhappy—why had she been so unhappy?—was going utterly. Oh! if she could only recall it, she should not be unhappy now! *Now* it meant home and father and mother. *Then* she had not understood the greatness of her possessions.

“Pray for her—pray for her life!” she whispered hoarsely to Helen, as the patient seemed to pass off again into sleep or unconsciousness.

Helen, taking Elfrida’s hand, the two girls knelt together, and without thinking of the words at all, which she might have done at another time, the former offered up an eager petition to One whom she felt to be the Father of both. Poor Elfrida did not once remember that it was the prayer of a heretic.

Late at night Helen returned in a cab to Belvidere Mansion. But the next night, and the next, she spent in Smokeham—going over in the dusk of the afternoon, and returning in the morning to her duties.

On the third night, at about twelve o'clock, Mrs. Foxley, who had not spoken for many hours, seemed suddenly to become conscious; and as she saw her daughter's face, a gleam of recognition came into her glazed eyes.

"I am better," she said. "Darling, I am so glad!"

Her look of sudden relief was reflected in Elfrida's countenance, and her eyes eagerly sought those of the doctor, who was seated with Helen Godfrey at the foot of the bed. But he looked very grave. Then he took Helen apart.

“In an hour or two,” he said, “not longer.”

That same morning, about eight o'clock, in the cold and struggling daylight appropriate to the hour and the season, Helen Godfrey, wrapped in a large cloak, was pursuing her way through the inky mud and grim atmosphere of the back streets of Smokeham. She was not walking fast, for her body was weary, and her heart was heavy. She was thinking sadly of Elfrida, whose beauty and distress had touched her deeply, and whose helplessness of character she had already begun to suspect. Everything seemed this morning to look blank and cheerless. Life itself appeared but a dull, prosaic road, pain and misunderstanding by the dreary way, and, at the end, death!

She was now in the outskirts, where the town joined, if not the country, at

least the great coal desert which represented it. Her eyes were bent on the ground, partly perhaps to enable her to pick her steps, and partly because they were dim with the sadness of her thoughts. All at once she heard herself addressed by name. The voice sent the blood tingling into her cheeks, grey with cold, and converted the dimness in her eyes into a sort of nervous lustre.

“I could hardly believe I saw you, Miss Godfrey, here at this early hour in the morning.”

Mr. West's manner seemed to ask an explanation, though he did not presume to do so in words.

“I have just come from a death-bed,” said Helen. She felt it such a relief to be able to say this; and the words were not more solemn than her thoughts. We are apt to

forget at such moments how death-beds are, in all communities, quite daily occurrences, and what bad taste it is to be solemn in speaking about them—for more than an instant.

“A death-bed! How you tremble, dear Miss Godfrey! Will you take my arm? May I walk part of the way, at least, with you?”

Whatever Helen might have done under ordinary circumstances, at that moment the temptation was too strong to be resisted; and again, as she leant upon his arm, strength and comfort passed into her inmost soul.

“I trust,” said Mr. West, with some hesitation, “you have lost no one very near, or very dear to you?”

“No, Mr. West. The lady who is just dead is hardly an acquaintance; and yet

circumstances have made me feel as if I had known her long. She—they are friends of—of my brother.”

“Of George or Will?”

“No—of my brother Frederick. He is the priest of the Roman Catholic chapel here.”

Helen stopped, and Mr. West did not immediately speak. At last he said,

“You have never spoken to me of this brother before, Miss Godfrey.”

“No. We were all so proud of him once; and lately we have been so angry with him. But now I know he is as good and true as ever, though he is a Roman Catholic priest. I feel I have no right, Mr. West, to expect you to believe this.”

“But I do believe it, Miss Godfrey, most fully.”

As he spoke, he looked full in her face.

His candid eyes brought conviction ; and, forgetting in that moment of exalted feeling all social disparities, feeling only that unspeakable comfort of perfect mutual comprehension, she told him all the events of the last few days—told him even what the world had said with regard to the part her brother had acted. He listened attentively. When she had finished speaking, he asked, and it struck her his voice was hoarse and unnatural,

“ Would you consider it impertinent on my part, Miss Godfrey, to ask the name of the lady of whom you have been speaking ? ”

“ Oh ! no—it is no secret. Her name is Elfrida Foxley.”

Her hand was still on his arm. She felt that arm thrill as if it had suddenly touched a Leyden jar, and when she looked in his

face, she saw it was flushed and agitated. He did not even seem aware that she was looking at him.

At last he caught her somewhat anxious gaze, and the disturbed look softened into tenderness.

“Dear Helen!” he said, and the words which were spoken under his breath seemed hardly addressed to her. In a measure he had now recovered himself. “Dear Miss Godfrey! I can hardly tell you how I thank you for your confidence. I feel I owe you mine in return. I owe it to you the more that, in the strangest manner, your narrative connects itself with my own past life. Oh! Helen, it is so humiliating to have to explain it to you.”

“Don’t explain it then, Mr. West; and yet——”

“And yet?”

“I want to know how it is connected with my brother and Miss Foxley.”

“You shall know ; but—the time is not come. You shall know all when—that is, if ever——” He stopped ; then began again—“At times I feel it so hard to hope.”

It seemed as if she could hear his heart beat.

“But bravest when hardest.”

Some of the old Puritan spirit of endurance and daring then spoke out of the tender eyes of Helen the martyr. Mr. West seemed to forget himself—hardly to know where he was. Strange words trembled on his lips, and spoke from his eyes. He suddenly turned away. Not till he had recovered his self-control did he speak again, then it was with energy.

“Helen ! your words are strength ; come what may. Only—only say that, even if it

should be defeat, you will believe I have hoped and striven."

He held his breathe to hear her answer.

"I will believe it."

Her voice was faint like her strength ; but he should have heard it through the roar of a cannonade.

They walked on in silence till they reached the be-pinnacled lodge of Belvidere Mansion. Here they stopped. Mr. West took the hand which rested on his arm. He could feel that she was trembling violently. Suddenly he let her hand drop, and turning away his face, said hoarsely :

"Good-bye—my—Miss Godfrey. God be with you!"

As he walked down that dull, straight road, resolutely, as if resisting some invisible power which dragged him back, was it the chill of that grim February morning which

made him fold his arms so tightly over his chest?—or set his features as if with some mighty effort at self-repression?

## CHAPTER III.

## THE GOD PAN.

WHAT was to be done with Elfrida Foxley? She had a small pittance for which some lady or family in reduced circumstances might be inclined to take her as a boarder. Frederick Godfrey knew of such a lady in a village in Berkshire, the same village, in fact, inhabited by the ex-professor. Under the care of this lady, and under the spiritual direction of his friend, he thought she might be safe and happy. But Elfrida would not hear of leaving Smokeham. She wept, besought, entreated, that

she might be allowed to remain, apparently ignoring that she was her own mistress, and could do as she pleased.

With many misgivings, and a sort of heathen feeling on the part of the priest, that he was urged on by a Fate which he had no power to resist, a home was procured for her in a small family, in the street which she already inhabited. It was not quite a suitable-home for Elfrida Foxley, but Frederick Godfrey could do no better. The master of the family was a clerk at a coal-merchant's. He had seen better days, his father having been a medical man of some local repute in his day. His wife, the daughter of a respectable tradesman, had been brought up to be a governess in middle-class families; and possessing a certain amount of musical accomplishment, endeavoured to eke out their somewhat scanty income by giving

music lessons to the daughters of some of the neighbouring tradesmen. Elfrida was to have her meals with these people, but she had a little sitting-room exclusively for herself, which she occupied at other times; though in the long evenings she was fain to join the circle downstairs, where she could play with the children, and sometimes unite with Mrs. Green in a duet.

It was a great change to poor Elfrida. The old-fashioned, aristocratic poverty of Willesmere Court, with which so much poetry and stateliness had been mingled, seemed hardly to have anything in common with her harsh-featured sister at Smokeham. The soiled table-cloths, coarse glass, leaden-like forks and spoons, and waiting-damsel with dress scant of buttons, and boots minus laces, revolted her taste, and at times depressed her spirits. Still, to be anywhere in Smoke-

ham was better than to be anywhere out of it. Smokeham was for her the antechamber of Paradise. She did not see the priest often—far seldomer than when her mother had been alive—but she could hear his voice in the frequent services ; she could think of his words of strength and encouragement at her last confession ; and live partly on memory, partly on expectation. Then she sometimes saw Helen, and whether it was that she was Mr. Godfrey's sister, and bore to him a certain resemblance, or that her manner carried with it the nameless comfort and support bestowed by warmth of heart and strength of character, certain it is that next to her brother, she had more influence with the friendless girl than anyone else. Sometimes Helen tried to persuade Elfrida to accept Mrs. Higginson's invitations. That Protestant lady had had many misgivings

about introducing a Roman Catholic to her family circle, more especially when she reflected upon her son's susceptibility to female charms ; but these had been over-ruled by pity for the friendless orphan, and by the little vanity of patronising and producing at her parties a girl belonging to so ancient a family, and whose wonderful beauty and romantic history had been so much talked of. Augustus, too, was away at present. But Elfrida was not to be persuaded.

The very sight of Mrs. Higginson's broad, smiling face and large person, enveloped in costliest velvets and furs, and finished off by masses of expensive millinery, was dreadful to Elfrida. She had not that largeness of heart which had enabled both her mother and Helen to see beyond these. In many ways Elfrida was her father's daughter. It was with dismay she found that

Helen was about to leave Smokeham.

“What shall I do without you?” she said, unconsciously echoing at once the sentiment of Moore’s Hinda and Dickens’ Dick Swiveller. “No sooner do I get to care for anybody or anything than I am deprived of it. It seems so hard! Whatever I wish is somehow wrong for me.”

The day had been when Helen would have felt inclined to reprove anyone for such a speech as this; but she, too, wished for something that was wrong for her. Or, at least, in the old, sensible days, when Helen was wise and strong-minded, she would have thought it wrong. It is so much easier to be sensible when one neither thinks nor feels, but goes simply on the beaten track by the finger-post, nothing doubting.

It was now within a week of the time

fixed for her to leave Belvidere Mansion. Augustus was to be back before Easter, and she was to be at Marshborough before his return.

Since the morning after Mrs. Foxley's death, she had not once seen Mr. West. He never came uninvited to Belvidere Mansion, and as the Higginsons had been giving a series of grand parties—much too grand for the presence of so humble a person as the clerk—Mr. West had lately been altogether ignored. On one occasion she had heard him mentioned by Mr. Higginson with emphatic approbation. There had been a threatening of a strike among the workmen in the paper-bag manufactory, which, through Mr. West's mediation, had not only been prevented, but a happier understanding had been effected between master and men than had subsisted for a

long time. He also believed he had been the means of averting an explosion of a serious character, in a new shaft in one of the coal-pits, by his scientific knowledge and observation.

"He is a wonderful fellow," said Mr. Higginson. "It is astonishing the power he has over the lower classes, and yet he never orders them about a bit, but is as polite to 'em as if they were members of parliament. And then his scientific knowledge—about the pits."

"But where did he acquire that, papa?" said Ethel, who, all the time her father had been speaking, had seemed to be absorbed with her book. She spoke with sudden animation. "He must have had a good education."

"He knew very little about science, Ethel, but he has studied it with a will ever

since I employed him ; and he has persuaded me to study it too. He is a wonderful chap. He goes down into the pits himself, to make himself acquainted with the practical working, and he studies in books a deal besides ; and about the bags he knows everything. The fellow I had before him was much too fine a gentleman to know anything but his accounts."

"But I thought he had to do with the factory only, and not with the pits."

"No more he had, when he first came ; but after a bit he asked my leave to go down into the pits, and I soon saw what metal he was made of. That was a lucky accident of yours, old woman. You have always been a lucky wife to me. It has saved me thousands and thousands. Since that, and the affair of the strike, I have appointed him factotum under me, with a

pretty little income for such a young fellow, I can tell you."

As Mr. Higginson spoke he fixed his eye on Helen Godfrey, who all this time had not uttered a word or made a single sign. She now asked :

"But how did he manage all this, Mr. Higginson? I can understand about the pits; but how—what is the secret of his power over the men?"

"He has a way, Miss Godfrey, a sort of way with them. I thought, now, *you* would have understood that."

Helen coloured deeply; to her own infinite annoyance. Yet there was joy in her heart. Its instincts had not deceived her. Lawrence West was no common clerk, no common man.

Another felt this as well as Helen, only in a rather different way.

“He has it in him to be rich and great some day,” was the form the belief took in the mind of Ethel Higginson.

Sir Anthony Hayward had returned home after the Christmas holidays. It was much on his account that the Higginsons had given so many parties. Ethel, too, frequently met him at the different country houses in the neighbourhood. She had frequent invitations for a few days at a time—society in this way contriving to avail itself of her company, while it had as little as possible to do with that of her parents. Ethel, on her own account, was fast becoming a woman of consequence ; and as the prospective Lady Hayward, a woman of great consequence. Sir Anthony felt now he had fully made up his mind. He wished he knew exactly how much the “bag man” would come down. It must be something hand-

some. Then the girl was a splendid girl, even if it were a few thousands less than he had a right to expect. It was on the cards that some one else might offer her advantages equal to those he had to bestow. He did not like to think of that. He was—yes, he was quite sure he was in love. Ethel, too, had been of late a little more doubtful in her manner. Could there after all be another?—or was she only coquetting to bring him to the point?

“Clever little devil!” was his mental ejaculation; and there was more of admiration than of reprobation mixed with it.

Certainly it was not a very romantic affair, on either side. As a rule, Ethel was only romantic for amusement. But there were times now when she felt within her the possibility of actual romance—to a certain extent at least. For instance, she could—yes,

she thought she could, hard as it seemed just when it was in her power, forego the position she had so coveted. But then that bourgeois life—how she loathed it ! As a mere matter of taste it revolted her.

The evening before Miss Godfrey's departure, her father brought in Mr. West to dinner. Helen dined downstairs. Though all the family liked her ; yet all except her pupils felt that in some way or other her departure would be a relief. Her successor, who had been recommended by an aristocratic friend of Ethel's, was a middle-aged French lady, with a swarthy complexion, frizzy hair standing on end all round her head, and warranted against love affairs.

Mrs. Higginson sat beside Helen in the drawing-room, after dinner, in the long Spring twilight, pouring out her last confidences, and inventing comforts for her jour-

ney. There were often tears in her eyes, and Helen felt herself ungrateful that her mind wandered so frequently from the subjects of the good lady's eloquence. She was mortified that, in spite of herself, her eyes would fix themselves on the great bow window where Ethel and Mr. West sat and chatted, as in a little separate apartment. Mr. Higginson, in the meantime, read the newspaper, occasionally joining both parties. Mr. Higginson had not the same dread of his daughter's flirtations that he had of his son's. Ethel had so much sense. She would never marry beneath her.

Helen had borne Mrs. Higginson's kindness, and the state of affairs in general, with tolerable fortitude at first, but the longer it continued, it became the more unendurable. Was this last evening to pass without her having one word with Mr. West? Would

Mrs. Higginson's good-hearted, inconsequential prosing never exhaust itself? Would Ethel talk to Mr. West all night? Oh! would he not come to say one farewell word to her? Mrs. Higginson's voice grated on her nerves. It seemed more than she could bear. Tears of worry rose to her eyes.

Just at that moment, to her infinite confusion, Mr. Higginson addressed her.

"Has Mr. West explained to you yet, Miss Godfrey, how it is he manages the men, and me, too, for that matter—ha! ha! ha!" and he laughed heartily. "You know you were asking me the other day."

Helen felt herself blush all over; and, to increase her embarrassment, Mr. Higginson spoke so loud that, though at some distance, Mr. West and Ethel stopped their conversation to listen. She was beginning to stam-

mer out some awkward reply, when Mr. West crossed over to where she was sitting. To add to the awkwardness, there was no chair near her but the one occupied by Mrs. Higginson, and hardly room to stand.

“Come, old woman,” said Mr. Higginson to his wife, “let us have a look at the new statue—Pan, I think they call him; though it seems a queer name for a god; but these Greeks seem to have been a queer sort of folks; and as for us wasting our time learning their crabbed tongue—what would Greek ha’ done for me, I ask?” And Mr. Higginson looked round on his spacious room and splendid furniture as if he challenged the world to answer.

The speech was a relief to Helen. It enabled her to laugh as her eyes met those of Laurence West; but her confusion returned as she saw Ethel standing, still in the

bow window, and regarding them fixedly.

“Let us go and see Pan too,” she said, saying the first thing which came into her head, and she went towards the conservatory, just outside of which the new statue had been placed, Mr. West following her, but Ethel remaining behind. As soon as they were alone there, for the elder Higginsons had gone outside, Mr. West asked,

“Was Mr. Higginson only talking nonsense, or was there really anything you wished to know?”

Helen felt instantly relieved. Certainly Mr. West had “a way.” She explained at once what Mr. Higginson had alluded to.

“He seems to think you possess some secret spell for managing the working people.”

He laughed.

“No spell at all; and no secret either

that I am conscious of. I only try the effect of the stale old rule, of doing as you would be done by. Capitalists and Hands, like men and women, cannot exist without one another ; and they must not only be friends, but show each other that they are friends.

Helen had now recovered from her embarrassment, and began to be interested in the conversation for its own sake.

“Very true ; but still, if one may judge by what one sees, there must be some difficulty in getting people to understand and act on this.”

“It is not so very difficult, when one begins by giving people credit for a wish to do what is right. How can you expect a man to listen to you if you address him as a sworn enemy, who you take it for granted means to be unjust and selfish? If both sides could only see it, their interests

are identical; or, better still, it would be if they could see that 'interests,' after all, are not, and never can be, the main thing."

"And have you succeeded in showing them this?" Her eyes at the moment were bright with admiration.

For an instant he seemed to forget what he was saying.

"Time has done a good deal. I believe it only wants perseverance in common sense and common kindness——" He broke off, and again began.—"Don't look at me like that, Helen, as if you thought me—what I am not. It makes me feel like a hypocrite. And—and yet it nerves me to try to be——"

She began to move away, and at the moment the Higginsons came in from the garden by one door of the conservatory, and Ethel from the drawing-room by the other. The

latter turned sharply back again, as if she had suddenly remembered something. Mr. Higginson winked at his wife, and, to cover Helen's confusion, Mr. West asked Mrs. Higginson how she liked the god Pan.

"He was a Greek piper, mayhap," said Mrs. Higginson, "like them Scotchmen as comes about—only he has not the—the pig—only the pipes."

"He was a god, my dear," interrupted her husband; "but, as you say, much like a bagpiper. Fancy us worshipping old Sandy that used to come round once a year, when we lived in the town. What dolts these Greeks must have been!"

This sentiment brought them all three to the drawing-room door, whither Helen had preceded them. Ethel, to her great relief, was not in that room, as she had expected. Mr. West did not sit down again. Not seem-

ing to perceive Ethel's absence, he made his adieux for the night. To Helen, of course, they were for a longer period. Of this he took no notice in words, but his farewell grasp seemed to carry straight to her heart confidence as absolute as any assurance in words could have done.

When he was gone she did not feel unhappy or desponding, as she had sometimes felt on former occasions, but strong and hopeful. The future, though vague, looked bright—a land green and gracious, glimmering through a Summer haze. A mystery, certainly, but a mystery she feared no more to penetrate than Columbus feared to land upon the strange, smiling shores of the New World.

She knew, for he had told her, that there was some wrong in his past history of which he bitterly repented. But he was

good and noble now. She knew it by an inner sense, stronger to her than all external evidence, and she loved him all the better for that deeper humanity bestowed both by the wrong and the repentance. Had not all the best and most interesting characters in Scripture erred? Had they not risen greater and stronger from their faults? How it was, or why it was, Helen hardly comprehended; but the heart, when warm and true, leads often by a short cut to the large and liberal conclusions which it has taken sages a lifetime to elaborate.

Helen did not feel inclined to sleep that last night in Belvidere Mansion. Instead of undressing immediately, she sat down, not listless, but thoughtful. She was at her window, alternately watching the lights of the distant town, and the shadows of the trees sweeping the lawn in the moonlight,

when she was interrupted by a tap at the door. Almost before she had time to answer, Ethel entered the room, at once excited and resolute.

"Miss Godfrey, I have come to ask you a plain question. Are you, or are you not, attached to Mr. West?"

There was a sudden rush of blood to Helen's face, caused partly by anger, partly by some other feeling.

"I cannot see, Miss Higginson, that you have any right to ask me any such question in any such manner."

"I ask you is *he* in love with you?"

"I decline to answer. I decline all conversation on the subject."

"You will not even tell me if you are engaged to him?"

"I have said I do not wish to speak about the matter at all."

Ethel grew pale, and lip and nostril quivered.

"I shall know what to think if you don't tell me."

"I am not engaged to Mr. West; but I don't answer because you asked me, but for a wholly different reason."

"Thank you, at least for answering it," said Ethel, now that she was relieved, a little ashamed of herself. "You must forgive me for being so unceremonious. Won't you, Helen?"

She held out her hand, and even made a motion as if she would have kissed Helen. Helen accepted the hand, though somewhat coldly, but drew back from the caress.

"I should like you to be my friend, Helen. I want—I need a friend." She spoke almost passionately.

Helen was moved: but she did not want

Ethel's confidence, and she did not really like her. She had no idea of resigning her lover to her. Helen's romance was not of a fantastical sort, and Laurence West loved *her*. At that moment she had not a doubt of it.

"Dear Miss Higginson, I am sorry—very sorry, but I—I don't know. I am going to leave you to-morrow—and—and—don't think me unfeeling, Ethel; but——"

"Good night, then, Miss Godfrey."

Ethel swept haughtily out of the room. It was her rôle to be a Princess. Yet Ethel Higginson's heart had opened then to Helen Godfrey.

Ethel was perfectly capable of appreciating and liking people on their own merits; but it did not follow, on that account, that she was to treat them with more than the world's consideration. Her

rule was to make others, according to their power, serve her at as little cost as possible to herself. That she should bestow her confidence, was surely reward enough for anyone in Helen's position. She was as much affronted by the repulse as if they had been the warmest friends all the time of Helen's sojourn at Belvidere Mansion. A feeling of anger was added to the passions of love and ambition which, like rival tyrants, made a battle-field of her heart. Strange to say, as a rival she did not fear Helen, now she knew there was no engagement. Personally, as well as for worldly reasons, Mr. West could not fail to prefer her, as soon as he knew he had a chance.

## CHAPTER IV.

## CONTRARY TO COMMON SENSE.

HELEN GODFREY had been at home for some weeks. At first it had seemed such joy, such freedom to be there, that there seemed little else to desire. But when the freedom had ceased to be a novelty, and the impression of that parting had begun to fade, the monotony and want of employment produced a listlessness of mind and depression of spirits, which she found it impossible to shake off, and hard to conceal.

Her mother had told her, with such evident pride and pleasure—almost with the

old look with which she used to greet the successes of Frederick—that she did not need to leave them again. Will had got a scholarship, and a maiden cousin of her own had left her a handsome legacy.

“And now, my Helen, I can once more have the happiness of having you beside me, and of knowing you are rewarded at last for your self-denying labour.”

Poor Helen! Her heart smote her that she did not feel rewarded—that the stillness of her home-life, together with the utter silence which had fallen upon the past, oppressed her like a nightmare. She would have liked to have been forced to work for her bread. It seemed as if an object for exertion had failed her, just as she needed it most. She felt it almost impossible to persuade herself to work with a merely subjective reason. It was a hard struggle to appear happy when

her heart was sick with longing ; and though she succeeded with Mrs. Godfrey, whose own straightforward, matter-of-fact disposition induced her always to believe that everything was exactly what it affirmed itself to be, she could not conceal from the more penetrating eyes of Lady Page that she was not quite what she used to be. Once or twice the Lord Mayor's widow had thought she had seen tears gather in her eyes. Sometimes in the morning she looked pale, as if she had not slept. Lady Page would fain have asked Helen's confidence ; but that was not so easy to do. Helen was not the girl to lay bare the recesses of her feelings even to her most intimate friend, without a certain amount of violence to the moral modesty of her nature. Yet she did wish to open her heart to Lady Page. Every burdened heart, like that of the " Ancient

Mariner," "burns within," until it has found relief by laying part of its load on another.

Helen often sat with her work with Lady Page in the morning, but they had not so much to say to one another as formerly. Neither of them could talk on mere superficial matters, with that unacknowledged desire on both sides for deeper speech.

"How silent you have become, Helen, dear!" said Lady Page, in that jesting tone in which so many earnest things are spoken. "I sometimes fancy you must have left your heart in Smokeham."

It was valiantly said, and her ladyship congratulated herself on having broken the ice.

Helen laid down her work, and looked her old friend full in the face. Her lip trembled, and her chest heaved.

"Tell me all about it, dear," said the kind woman, drawing Helen towards her. And Helen, no longer the martyr, proudly marching to voluntary trials, hid her face on her friend's shoulder, and burst into tears, like any common love-sick girl.

"Is it Augustus Higginson?" asked Lady Page, for she had often heard how handsome and what a lady-killer he was.

"Oh, no! He fell in love with me—in a way—*he* will soon get over it."

"Poor Augustus! I think you ought to pity him a little more than that." Nevertheless, Lady Page was glad. "Will you tell me then, dear, who it is, and why it makes you unhappy?"

But instead of answering, Helen all at once lifted her head and said passionately,

"I think I shall go out as a governess again! I could bear it a great deal better if

I had something to do, and something else to think about. The world is very hard to women. If we don't marry, we have neither part nor lot in its life; and men call us mercenary when we marry for position and money; forgetting that we can find neither, nor even occupation, without marrying. I sometimes wish I had married Augustus Higginson."

"My dearest Helen, I am sure you cannot be in earnest, if you really love another person."

"Oh, but suppose he does not love me! I was so sure he did; but now everything seems unreal, except—except the pain here." And Helen laid her hand on her heart with a look that shocked her kind-hearted friend.

"This is bad indeed! Tell me all about

it, my dearest. It will do you good to tell."

In an interrupted, not particularly lucid narrative, which began with the end rather than the beginning, Helen contrived to give Lady Page some notion of her position with regard to Mr. West. Of her feelings, she required to say nothing. They were only too plain. It was not at all the sort of story Lady Page had expected to hear from Helen Godfrey. It seemed out of keeping with all her pre-conceived notions of her young friend's character, that she should fall in love with a common clerk, without name or birth or position, and who, from all Lady Page could discover from the narrative, had flirted indiscriminately with her and with Ethel Higginson, without having made any declaration of his af-

fections to either. The marvellous thing to Lady Page was, that two such young women should have condescended to flirt with him.

The only redeeming point was the good opinion entertained of him by Mr. Higginson. Still Lady Page was old enough and worldly-wise enough to know that there are men who would count it dishonour not to keep faith with men, who would esteem it a light matter indeed to break it with women ; society, in fact, countenancing them in the rather curious distinction. Sensible Lady Page felt there was only one thing to advise.

“Helen, darling, it pains me to say it ; but you must think of him no more. You have been home more than two months, and you have heard neither of nor from him.”

“But I did not expect to hear. He gave

me to understand I should not hear till he had fulfilled some vow—or——”

“Very romantic, but I fear not very honest ! All the time he is probably giving Ethel to understand something of the same sort. Depend upon it, dearest, if he can get Ethel, he will not think of you.”

“No, no, he is true ; he is good. I am sure—I am quite sure.” For the recollection of his candid look, of his agitated, truthful manner, returned at the moment with entireness of conviction.

“Dear girl ! Love is blind.”

“No, Lady Page. Love sees most truly—nothing sees truly but love. And he does not flirt with Ethel ; Ethel flirts with him.”

“Helen, Helen !” and there was reproof in the good woman’s tone, which melted into pity as she spoke. “My poor dear girl !

I wish, oh! how I wish you had married Augustus Higginson! He is a gentleman; and if you had only told me, I could have managed matters with his father."

"I could not have married him. I did not really mean it when I said it. I will never marry anybody. What I want is something to do. I want to be able, when I wake in the morning, to feel I have something to wake for. It lies so heavy on my heart in the morning. I always wish so I could sleep again—do nothing but sleep. We will not speak any more about him, as we do not agree about him, dear Lady Page; but you will help me to find something to do, won't you?"

"That I will, my dear—at least, with my whole heart I will try. There is the new Home, something like the one at Smokeham, for training nurses; but it is High Church."

“No, no, dearest Lady Page; if you were ill, or my mother, I would nurse you with my whole heart and strength, because I love you. But I don’t think I could spend my life in nursing people I did not know. It is not my vocation.”

“Dear Helen,” said Lady Page, “how you are changed since you went to Smokeham !”

“Because I have seen that people can be different from ourselves, and yet as good as we are. Oh, if I could only make my mother believe in Frederick ! Or why is it I cannot convince you ——”

“Because, my dear, I am fifty-five instead of twenty-three, and because painful experiences, many a one, have taught me that all is not gold that glitters.”

“Then do you believe in nobody, Lady Page?” said Helen, with a certain irritation

in her tone, which her friend freely forgave.

“Yes, Helen, I believe in yourself and in your mother, most thoroughly.”

“And you would believe in Mr. West, too, if you saw him; but because you don’t see him, you are prejudiced, and think me a foolish, lackadaisical girl.”

As Helen spoke, she took up her hat, kissed Lady Page with a curious mixture of affection and indignation, and went off to take a walk by herself in the palace gardens, before returning home. Lady Page sat looking after her with mingled admiration and sorrow.

“Was that Helen Godfrey? Helen, who had always been so quiet, and had seemed to have almost too much sense for her age? Instead of a modest, correct-thinking little girl, she had changed into an impassioned, independent-minded woman. Although, ac-

according to Lady Page's "views" and "principles," such a change ought to have been no improvement, yet somehow or other she had never before loved her so well, or respected her so much. And how improved she was in looks! There was in her whole appearance a certain warmth and expression, as if all that had been negative in her had assumed life and colour.

What a pity, what a thousand pities that such a creature should throw away her affections on a vulgar, flirting clerk! Now, Lady Page did not of course despise clerks. Her husband had had several worthy clerks; but certainly no romantic nimbus had encircled the brows of any of them. With not one of them would Helen Godfrey—at least, so she would have thought—have fallen in love; not of course that clerks, in the abstract, are more unloveable than

other men ; and the nimbus, after all, is, in most cases, subjective ; still Lady Page had known Helen, and her tastes and prejudices, too well to believe that she would ever have invested with that aureole a head that was wont to be adorned with a pen behind the ear. It was incomprehensible!—it was contrary to common sense !

But it was not contrary to common sense that Helen should wish to exorcise the demon by work. There she and Lady Page were at one again.

“For Satan he finds mischief still,” not only for idle hands, but for “idle hearts to do,” thought her ladyship, recalling to mind the dame-school in a Kentish village, where she had sat upon the stump of a tree, called a “Simon,” and imbibed the gentle Puritanism of good old Dr. Watts. And now “Satan,” in the form of a paper-bag-inven-

tor's clerk, had once more verified the wisdom of the good Divine. Something to do—some real work—that would be the only cure, Lady Page felt as well as Helen ; and Lady Page was equally aware that lace-work, or tatting, though Helen could do both beautifully, would be quite unavailing. It was a hard nut to crack, for, unfortunately, “*La carrière ouverte aux talents*,” means only talents of the masculine gender.

Truly that “cry of the women,” whose minds are narrowing and rusting from disuse, whose hearts are growing bitter in loneliness, and who are, for want of this *carrière ouverte*, languishing in poverty and neglect, is becoming in the ear of society as importunate as was that of the familiar spirit of Scottish legend in the ears of the wizard, Michael Scott. The wizard, we have been told, settled the demon at last

by assigning him the task of making ropes of sea-sand. But society sets no task but that of being wives and mothers to its educated women, and then provides hardly half of them with the occupation. As to the other half—that vast army of social martyrs, three millions strong—what is left for them but to beg or starve, with all the demoralization consequent on either of these predicaments? But what does it signify? Society progresses. Individuals (though one might almost have thought three millions were “masses”) must suffer.

And, after all, it is very pleasant as it is—that is, for the men—I mean the common-place men, to whom a woman is never a “woman and a sister.” The scarcity of an article raises the demand, particularly when it represents not only itself, but everything else the world has to offer.

Some such thoughts as these passed vaguely through the mind of the Lord Mayor's widow as she sat, after Helen had left her, knitting a counterpane in little three-cornered bits. Lady Page had been a prosperous woman all her life, and to such people things as they are naturally appear all right. But she loved Helen Godfrey as her own child. Helen, grey-haired, middle-aged, unmarried, disappointed, soured, poor, was not a picture her heart loved to contemplate; and she well knew that girls as handsome, and clever, and high-spirited as Helen, had before now succumbed to such circumstances as those in which she was placed. A world in which all this seemed likely to happen was not quite as it should be.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE NIGHT OF ETHEL'S SUCCESS.

SPRING passed, and Summer came, with its long hot days, so blue and fragrant and dreamy among the rich, green meadows, and under the leafy trees at Willesmere Court; so solemn and monotonous in the ivied nooks of the Cathedral Close at Marshborough; so black and glaring, so dusty and stifling, in the busy, industrial town of Smokeham.

A hideous lodging was that inhabited by Laurence West. The priest's was a Paradise to it. Cabbages and gooseberry bushes

were beautiful objects in comparison with the little hucksters' shops, with rows of ginger-beer bottles which formed a main feature in its view. It was in a mean street on the way to the factories, which turned their tall, grim backs upon it in the middle distance. The houses were built of brick, much weather-stained and soot-begrimed. To talk of fresh air if one opened the windows, sounded like a lampoon. One breathed an atmosphere which seemed impregnated perennially with the scent from a conflagration of innumerable chimneys. The dust of the streets was black, like finely-pulverised coal, and of a most subtle and penetrating quality. This was probably the reason why everything in Mr. West's parlour was pervaded by a monotone of grimness. The old Brussels carpet, with obliterated pattern, made possibly when Brussels carpets

were first invented ; the paper, which one could dimly guess had once been brown and blue ; the green table-cover and the hair-cloth sofa and chairs, had under its influence become toned down into harmonious “invisibility” of tint. The bright ugliness of Mr. Godfrey’s parlour was beauty by comparison.

Then Mr. West had no possessions of his own to give variety to the scene. Lately, to his landlady’s amazement, he had added to the furniture of his sleeping apartment by the purchase of a great looking-glass, a bath, and a white toilet-set, of what seemed to her magnificence so great that it would have befitted Mr. Higginson himself better than his clerk. But the slight affront she had at first felt at the arrival of these luxurious articles was converted into reverence and gratitude when she discovered what a high

position Mr. West now occupied at "Higginson's," and how he was said even to be a partner. It was quite a feather in her cap that so great a man should continue to be her lodger, and be quite contented with his sitting-room furniture, and the simple mutton-chop, beyond which her cooking did not much extend. She sometimes wondered if he was very mean that he never purchased dainties, kept any company, or indulged in any amusement; but then he paid her punctually, and she knew that he was liberal, with what appeared to her to be lavishness, to the wives or families of any of the workmen that might be invalided. He did indeed, since he had become rich, dress handsomely.

"And a 'an'some young man he is," said the landlady, "with his pleasant blue eyes, and a way with him like a prince, though

he is always so pleasant-spoken. Miss 'Igginson herself might fancy him, and he is a deal there."

But most nights he spent at home in study. The heavy shade of unhappiness which, during the early part of his residence in Smokeham, appeared to cloud a countenance which seemed rather to have been made for joy, was now replaced by an expression which, if not satisfied, was hopeful. He looked ten years older, but he had gained by the look of maturity.

Willesmere Court had been done up for the Higginsons. The moat had been filled up, spacious apartments had been added, new gardens had been made, and the family were going down in August to take possession, and to establish themselves as county gentry.

"You must take a run there with me,

West, for a few days. I should like you to see our new place. It will do you a deal of good."

Mr. Higginson had become very gracious to young West. He respected in him a probable future millionaire, and he liked him, too, for better reasons than that. But Mr. West declined the invitation decidedly. He was quite well; he needed no change; he could not spare time from his work.

Mr. Higginson knew he could have spared time. Still he did not disapprove. "West was going the right way to be rich. He was certain to be rich!" So he thought. He even approved of the way he fancied he was making love. "Knowing young man," was his reflection. "Secured a nice sensible girl, that won't spend his money, if she don't bring any of her own. Prudent fellow to

wait till he can afford to marry ! The young men were not quite so sensible in my day !” This last reflection was *au arrière pensée*, and if it rose a note higher in the gamut of admiration, mingled with it was a chord of something which was not quite admiration, as Mr. Higginson recalled the tall, comely, bright-eyed, clear-skinned girl who had long been Mrs. Higginson.

“ Well, then, if you won’t come to Willesmere Court, will you come to a grand ball we are going to give at Belvidere next week ?”

Mr. West accepted this invitation, in the readiest manner. One would have said that by nature he was fond of balls. It did glance through Mr. Higginson’s mind that it was odd so very prudent a young man should be fond of balls. But Mr. Higginson had not much time to bestow on solving pro-

blems in human nature. He had more weighty matters to think about.

It was to be a monster party, therefore it could not consist of the *élite* only. Monster parties seldom do. So it would be all “*selon les règles*,” the primary necessity of parvenu existence. There were to be all the country neighbours round, and all the Smokeham people of a certain class.

Sir Anthony Hayward, as Member for Smokeham, was to open the ball with Ethel Higginson. The night was very fine and very hot; but miracles had been wrought to cool the temperature in the ball-room. A long suite of rooms was thrown open, magnificently decorated with the rarest and most gorgeous plants. The grounds were splendidly illuminated, and furnished with all sorts of seats, and ornamental tents, with refreshments. The music came from town,

and the ices and Champagne cup were of unimpeachable quality. Ethel was splendidly dressed—in black and gold—everything she wore simple but handsome. She looked like a queen of night, and as if she might have had a court of stars. Sir Anthony Hayward, as he led her to the top of the room, beheld her, in his mind's eye, presented at Court, and felt it would be something to possess a wife looking like that. Yet Ethel to-night was a little distraite. Her eyes wandered up and down the long suite of rooms among the guests, and frequently sought that door by which the announcements were made. Towards the middle of the dance, however, she seemed to collect her thoughts, and to give all her attention to Sir Anthony, with whom she walked out on the illuminated terrace. He was very gallant, and paid her many compliments of the stereotyped, ortho-

dox quality. He was on the point, indeed, then and there, of paying her the greatest compliment of all, and was trying to arrange the suitable speech, when she suddenly discovered she must return to the ball-room, as she had promised to provide some young ladies with partners for the next dance.

The first person she saw on entering the room was Mr. West, waltzing with a Smokeham young lady ; for Mr. West was now sought after by Smokeham ladies, and not frowned on by Smokeham papas.

Ethel was struck by his appearance and dancing, and not Ethel alone. It appeared that the Smokeham young ladies were not to have a monopoly of Mr. West.

“ Who was that distinguished-looking young man ? so agreeable ! What, her father’s junior partner ! ” (Ethel had not said “ clerk ”) “ was he a young man of family ? It

was quite the fashion now to go into trade." In short, Ethel Higginson saw clearly that society would accept Laurence West.

"Manners makyth man;" and nowhere is the motto of old William of Wykeham more practically true than in England. Birth is an advantage, and position is a greater advantage; but money and manners will get a man anywhere—seldom money without manners; but frequently manners without money. Thus we preserve our aristocratic bearing amid our democratic institutions; thus we force our moneyed classes into good behaviour; our bene nati into civility; and both into that just regard of man, as man, which is at the bottom not only of good manners, but of Christianity itself.

Ethel Higginson was quick to perceive and to comprehend all facts, and indications of facts, relating to social success. All at

once it seemed to her that the indulgence of her inclinations might not be altogether incompatible with her ambition. There had been moments when she felt as if she could have sacrificed everything to her passion. Now the sacrifice demanded had shrunk greatly in dimensions. Still it would be a sacrifice. No presentation at Court, no London season, no county position for years to come—till perhaps it was too late for her to make the brilliant figure she had always felt sure she could make. “Art is long, and life is short.” It seemed hard to Ethel Higginson that she could not have blossom and fruit at once.

But all this time Laurence West did not seek her, and it was the middle of the evening before the exigencies of society gave her an opportunity of addressing him.

“What a dancer you are!” she said, as, after some skilful manœuvres, she found herself at last standing near him, both for the moment disembarrassed of partners. “You seem to me to have danced with everybody in the room but myself.”

There was a slight tremor in her voice, and her proud eye fell beneath the open glance of his.

“I might say the same of you, Miss Higginson; but with so many partners to choose from, and so many with whom it must be your duty to dance, I felt I should be too presuming to suppose you had time for your father’s clerk.”

He spoke pleasantly, half in earnest, half in jest. Ethel looked at him reproachfully. A new idea rose in his mind. It was very awkward; but it was impossible now not to lead her to the waltz.

“Why should you think me so worldly?” she whispered in so low a tone that he felt himself justified in pretending not to hear. They were just beginning the dance. He could feel her heart beat quick, and hear her draw a long nervous breath. Ethel and he both danced well, and in perfect time. They floated round and round the room in a delicious harmony of sound and motion. It was pleasure even to Laurence West, and for a moment his annoyance was forgotten. To Ethel it was Paradise. It seemed as if she could never be weary of that luxury of movement, or that rapture of association. At last she stopped.

“Now take me into the garden for a breath of air. I feel faint with the heat and the lights.”

He placed her hand within his arm, and they went out into the brilliantly illumin-

ated garden. Ethel drew a deep breath of delight.

“Are you tired?” he asked, not without concern.

“Not much. It was charming!”

Meanwhile, she led him down a shady path, bordered with rose-trees. There the beauty of the scene was less theatrical, and Vauxhallish, or Cremornish, than in the more brilliant parts of the grounds. It was very quiet. There were no illuminations, only the stars overhead. The sounds of music and voices were subdued by the distance, and the cool night air breathed only the delicate fragrance of the roses. If Mr. Higginson’s clerk found it somewhat embarrassing to be walking here alone with Mr. Higginson’s daughter, he found it also—he would not give a name to that other sensation. Women had made love before

to Laurence West ; but not such women as Ethel Higginson. He would, perhaps, have been more than human—and this youth was human all over—had he experienced no such sensation. This proud, beautiful girl was known, too, to be chary of her favour. Ethel's beauty had never seemed so great as at this moment. There was a softened lustre in her eyes, a more appealing cadence in her voice, in harmony with the intoxication of the whole scene. His heart too began to beat, if not with love, with a temptation which seemed the shadow of it. To repulse her seemed impossible. Then, like a flash, came the thought that if he married Ethel Higginson his struggles would be over and the goal won—a righteous goal !

For a brief instant the temptation almost looked like a duty. He breathed hard.

Words rose to his lips ! Ethel saw that he was moved, for her eyes were fixed on his face. In a dream of delight, and nothing doubting—for had she not everything to give which he could possibly desire?—she clung to the arm which supported her with a yet tenderer pressure. She thought he would speak ; but he hastily turned away his face. To Ethel it seemed he was too modest—too conscious of the difference in their positions to make the most of the opportunity. The moments—the precious moments were passing so quickly ! In a sudden delirium she picked a rose—a rose with delicate, shell-like petals, deepening into a ruby glow at the heart, and offered it to him.

The selection was unfortunate. It was Helen's favourite rose. How well he remembered the day on which she had told

him so ! All at once the delusion passed ; the temptation ceased. The love of his higher nature belonged to the woman who had the power to quicken his higher qualities. What he had felt during those brief mad minutes, ah !—it reminded him of Homburg and Baden.

He had taken the rose mechanically, and stood now handling it doubtfully. Ethel marked the change, and the absent look in his face. At last he said,

“ It is Miss Godfrey’s favourite rose.”

The light died suddenly in Ethel’s eye, and the beauty faded out of her face. She had quitted Mr. West’s arm ; but she grasped at it again—at least, she grasped at something. Her lips were white, and her frame shook with trembling. He almost carried her to a seat which was close by. He pitied her—he pitied her most truly.

It was an unspeakable relief to hear footsteps and voices close at hand, and a still greater relief to find that they proceeded from Mr. Higginson and Sir Anthony Hayward, who had strolled out together to discuss the local political horizon, with a tacit understanding that they had a common interest in the canvass of the latter, after the "dissolution," now daily expected.

"Miss Higginson is feeling a little overcome," said the clerk, addressing her father. "she has been over-exerting herself; and the heat and excitement——"

"Bless my soul!" said Sir Anthony Hayward, seating himself beside Ethel, and taking her hand. "I am more grieved than——"

"I am quite well again now," said Ethel, sitting upright, and allowing him to retain her hand, the pressure of which she had returned.

“Thanks for helping me, Mr. West ; but now I have my father and Sir Anthony Hayward.”

She was still pale, but her voice was firm, and a little haughty, as she thus dismissed him.

Laurence West bowed respectfully, and turned away. In a few seconds, Mr. Higginson joined him, and with unusual familiarity, as if under the influence of some excitement, put his arm in that of his clerk.

“Three spoils sport, they say, West, as I daresay you know. Well, now, who would have said, nigh forty years ago, when I first came to Smokeham, with hardly a rag to my back, that I should have lived to see my daughter a baronet’s lady, and taking her place with the proudest ! Courage, my good lad,” here Mr. Higginson slapped the

young man on the back, "your day's a-com-  
ing fast enough—I can see that with half an  
eye."

And then Mr. Higginson, for they were  
now at the door, looked round on all the  
splendour; and triumph lighted up his face.

I have heard it said that the disposition  
of the man generally unveils itself in a state  
of intoxication. If it be the same with  
the intoxication of success, a certain vulgar  
self-satisfaction, which, however, rather  
opened than closed the heart, was Mr. Hig-  
ginson's most striking characteristic. Mr.  
West had long since forgiven the vulgarity,  
for the sake of the benevolence.

But the uppermost feeling that night in  
the breast of Laurence West was one of  
humiliation. He could not forgive himself  
for having even for a moment felt that  
temptation. It was treason to Helen. To

have married for money would have been no reparation, but a deeper degradation. So felt this romantic youth, who had that intensity of nature which can neither be good nor bad by halves.

It was morning, broad daylight, when Ethel Higginson withdrew to her own room after the ball. She threw herself on the sofa, thankful for the time that the play was played out, and that she needed no longer to smile and sparkle. Her face was haggard, and her heart was wild. One moment she hated Laurence West, and the next she felt she could have thrown herself at his feet. Oh! if he had only loved her! That he did not love her, was hardly the worst of it. Helen, the wife of Laurence West, triumphing over her, knowing her humiliation!

The table was strewn with books. Once

Ethel had studied grave matters, in a superficial, magazine-article way. It was her rôle to be intellectual, as well as fascinating. Lately she had read only novels—novels of a certain class, though not all by the same author.

The language of these books was picturesque and impressive, and Ethel had learned from them to believe that the hero of the upper classes was a being who united the strength and the passions of a savage with the polish of a courtier; the heroine, a creature of impulses ungovernable, breaking all barriers of propriety, all ties of affection and duty. She had read these works till she really began to believe that “society” consisted of such varnished savages.

She had reckoned on her beauty awakening a return passion, which every motive of self-interest must necessarily confirm, and

neither her heart nor her studies told her of any other motive to love or matrimony. Now it appeared she was wrong; or was it the clerk's vulgar, middle-class tastes which made him prefer that common-place girl to herself?

She tried to conjure up pictures of the greatness which awaited her, to remember that she was free of Smokeham for ever, free of those associations which had so revolted her aristocratic idealism. She should live no longer among people who dropped H's, appraised the money value of everything in the earth beneath, and almost in the heavens above, and feared to be natural, lest they were ungentle. Drawing-rooms, Court balls, the stir of intellectual life, the homage of distinguished men, would be no longer vague and brilliant mysteries, but common daily life. It was hard that

now, as she drew near to that beatific vision, it began to look tarnished and dim. Once more she felt the tears start to her eyes, but as she caught a glimpse of her face in the glass, she resolutely repressed them. What would become of her triumph, if she were to look like that?

Suddenly, in a great armful, she swept all her books into the grate, lighted a match, and watched them pass up the chimney in smoke, till hardly a handful of black ashes remained. Then she undressed, saying resolutely, "I am not going to die. I have still the whole world to live for. This night is the night of my success."

## CHAPTER VI.

## A SHOWER OF RAIN.

THE Bloomshire and the Blackshire county papers announced that J. Higginson, Esq., was entertaining a large party of distinguished guests at Willesmere Court, his country seat in the former county ; and a few weeks later, not only in those well-known provincial organs, but in several of the London papers, appeared quite a long paragraph, describing the splendid festivities at the same ancient residence consequent on the marriage of Sir Anthony Hayward, M.P. for Smokeham, with the beauti-

ful and accomplished eldest daughter of the same successful gentleman. But we have nothing to do with any such magnificence at present. Leaving, therefore, Sir Anthony and Lady Hayward to their Autumn tour in Northern Europe, and their Winter at Rome, we will return to Smokeham, and to the fallen fortunes of the daughter of the worn-out race which had in old times flourished so proudly at Willesmere Court.

Elfrida Foxley had now lodged for more than half a year with the Greens, and the Greens, who had been in raptures with her at first, were now a little tired of her. They allowed that there was a great deal that was amiable about her, that she looked "like a picture" sitting in the room; but "she took up so much of Mrs. Green's time with the constant little attentions which seemed necessary to her, and even when

these were rendered, did not seem so grateful and cheerful as she ought to have been." On the contrary, she looked frequently out of spirits, or out of humour. Mrs. Green more and more began to think it was the latter, perhaps because she began more and more to be a little out of humour herself.

When Mr. Green came home at night after a day at his desk, he often found his wife more inclined to grumble at the constant worry of her microscopic trials than to sit down as of old with a disengaged mind to hear the Smokeham on-dits, or to execute a duet with the piano and flute. Then Mr. Green had a rise in salary, and they began to fancy they might try to do without a lodger.

In the meantime, Elfrida, quite unconscious that she was otherwise than a model lodger, bore the coarse table-cloths, the dim

glass, and the unlaced boots in a manner which appeared to herself to be magnanimous. In her mother's house she had never had any notion that these things did not come all right of themselves. Now and then, when they were a little worse than usual, such as when there was a distinctly outlined thumb-mark upon her tumbler at dinner, or when Cinderella's right foot, catching in the tongue of her left boot, threw her with a butter-boat in her hand upon Elfrida's new black dress, she felt as if she ought to complain, but was withheld either by good-temper or timidity. It was therefore with amazement as well as distress that in the Autumn of the same year she had taken up her abode in the Green establishment, she received Mrs. Green's notice to quit at the end of three months. Mrs. Green had been a little worried at the

time, and gave the notice with a slight acerbity of manner, of which she repented at once, the moment she saw what distress it caused to her lodger.

“Want to part with me! Dear Mrs. Green! Why should you want to part with me? I am sure I give you no trouble, and I am very easily pleased. And where am I to go, and what am I to do?”

Mrs. Green, who had been prepared with a list of the troubles she gave, and a neat, but quite high and mighty little speech of how their humble ways were not suited to a person who had been brought up quite “a fine lady,” fell, on the contrary, into an uncomfortable silence, which she only broke to say awkwardly:

“You see Mr. Green’s salary is raised, and our family is increasing, and in my situation at present——”

“Oh! but I might be of use to you then. You know I could read to you when you were in bed, and I could—I could—warm the flannels, and—and perhaps hold the baby, and pour out the tea for Mr. Green.”

“Thank you, dear,” said Mrs. Green, kindly, but firm to her purpose. At last Elfrida began to perceive that she was obdurate. Then the pride of the Foxleys came to her aid, and drying her tears, she said :

“Very well, Mrs. Green—in three months.”

But as soon as Mrs. Green left the room, the poor, homeless, helpless child burst into a great passion of tears. Oh, if she only had somebody to speak to! somebody to advise her!

She could not in this crisis, as she had so frequently done before in much smaller

emergencies, run downstairs to unburden her mind to Mrs. Green, and so prevent that lady from going to turn the pie in the oven till the crust was burnt black.

Although only September, it was a wild, autumnal day, more like October. The wind whistled drearily, and occasional cold drops fell from the clouds as they hurried breathlessly by. In the morning, dismal as it was to be alone, Elfrida had made up her mind to remain within doors ; but now she could not rest. The silence and the solitude were unbearable. She longed for counsel and support. She longed to see Mr. Godfrey, but she durst not seek him. If she were out, she might meet him by chance. Slender though the chance seemed, she hastened to avail herself of it. Any sort of movement was better than the feverish unrest of spirit which caused her to beat about the little

room, as her own impatient heart fluttered in the prison of her bosom.

Hastily putting on her hat, she hurried downstairs. For a moment she stood hesitating at the door. Which way should she turn? Poor Elfrida! Her position at that moment might have stood for a type of her position in life. Which way should she turn? Suddenly she remembered that Mr. Godfrey sometimes, about this hour, went to visit a little colony of Irish labourers beyond the town, in the direction of one of the pit villages. No sooner had the thought entered her brain than, as if driven by an irresistible impulse, she started off. It was a most unpleasant walk. She had to struggle against a high wind, which blew right in her face, and bore along with it a very storm of sharp black dust, which nearly blinded her. On she went, how-

ever, till she had left the town behind. In the open country, being more exposed to the violence of the wind, she could scarcely keep her feet. Even the dust had not abated, for this was no region of green fields and flowery lanes, but inhospitable as the Sahara, and grim as Tartarus. She had walked, or rather fought on, to a much greater distance than she usually attempted, even when the weather was propitious, and the scene inviting, and all the way had scarcely met a living soul, when she came in sight of a row of labourers' huts. There she thought she should surely meet Mr. Godfrey, although she had really no reason for such an expectation. But she had made such an effort, that surely Destiny or Providence (she did not dare to say God) would not be so cruel as to disappoint her. It was in vain that she walked up and down several

times in front of the houses, and even timidly ventured to ask one or two women who came out to the doors if Mr. Godfrey was there. Most of them merely stared at her, but at last one woman asked whom she meant by Mr. Godfrey. Elfrida, having explained that he was the Catholic priest, was informed she had come to the wrong place. There were "no Papishes" there, and the woman concluded by recommending her to make haste home, as there "wor rain a-coming for certain sure!"

Elfrida turned back, her heart sunk with disappointment, and all at once conscious that a lower and colder cloud than any she had yet noticed was spreading over the sky. She began also to perceive how far she was from Smokeham, and how, if that portentous cloud were to burst—and it seemed even now too full to hold together—she must be

wet through long before she could reach her lodging. She began to repent bitterly that she had left its shelter, and to walk rapidly homewards. She had not gone far, when at some distance behind her—it seemed as if it were at the other side of the plain—she could see that a cloud, a dense, shapeless, yet defined mass, had come in contact with the solid earth, and was advancing upon her with inevitable swiftness. Alarmed at the wide space which intervened between herself and the town, she quickened her pace, as the rain came faster and faster, till sharp stitches in her side nearly took away her breath, and her heart beat so quick she thought she must faint.

It is doubtless but a trifling misfortune to be caught in a shower of rain. But the extent of a misfortune may be subjective as well as objective. Elfrida was in the mood

to be frightened and depressed by the smallest adverse circumstances. Her spirit was fainting already with perplexity and disappointment. The heavy, driving rain, the wind which urged her on with a violence that threatened to lift her off her feet, were like the last stick which breaks the back. She was obliged to put down her umbrella for the wind, and the rain-drops rattled as they rolled down her black silk jacket. Tears fell fast from her eyes. How bitterly she repented ever having come out! The sight of a shed at a little distance afforded her a prospect of shelter till the worst of the rain was over. At least, she would stop to take breath for a minute. It was apparently a temporary shed belonging to some workmen. There was a pick-axe and an old wheelbarrow in it. She seated herself on the wheelbarrow, she felt so tired. Oh!

how weary and how dreary was everything in the world !

She had been seated some minutes, when a figure, walking rapidly, and with head bent before the blast, passed in front of the shed. Elfrida's heart leaped up with a tumultuous bound, and half wild with the relief and joy, she rushed out, and laid her hand on the arm of the priest. Surely it was a Divine interposition ! As he felt the unexpected touch, and met the most unexpected sight, the blood rushed to his face, and there was a sudden light in his eye.

“Oh, I am so glad, so thankful ! Surely our Blessed Lady has sent you to me now !”

He hardly knew what to say ; something made him feel that it was not safe to speak. He took her hand gravely, though his own trembled, and led her again under the shed.

Then he said, "What is the matter? Why are you here?"

She plunged into a somewhat incoherent but eager explanation, or self-defence, for though his tone had been gentle, her sensitive heart had detected in it a chord of disapprobation. She described what had passed with Mrs. Green, her loneliness, her misery, her necessity for counsel and help. If her words were not eloquent, at least her beauty, her passion, her terribly real distress, were full of the most overwhelming eloquence.

"And you know there is nobody but you—no one—no one else."

What a battle Frederick Godfrey had fought, God alone knew! But the enemy, that is, his natural feelings, had taken him unawares in the most unguarded and weakest of moments.

"My darling!" he cried; and as she

seemed to draw a little nearer to him, he suddenly caught her in his arms, and strained her to his heart in a wild abandonment to a temptation too strong for his powers of resistance.

And Elfrida! Could Frederick Godfrey do wrong? Such a **thing** never entered her mind. Was he not her director, **her** spiritual guide, her conscience, the very voice of God?

For a few brief seconds perhaps neither of them thought; they only felt.

But to the priest, at least, reflection soon returned; as it may be supposed to return to the evil doer at the sound of the last trump. Suddenly disengaging himself, he stood still: in his own eyes a traitor, a dishonoured man, a disgraced priest! Drawing back some paces, he said,

“Elfrida, from my soul I crave your

pardon. I could humble myself in the dust at your feet that I should have been so unworthy of your trust."

His voice was faint, but every syllable cut into the heart of his listener. She made no reply, but looked at him with pale, amazed countenance.

"We must never meet again," he said; and his tone now was husky and smothered.

She uttered a cry of despair, and sprang to him with wild, beseeching words, not to leave her, not to forsake her, that without him she should die!—she should be miserable for ever! She hardly knew what she said or did. It was all blind, unreasoning impulse—the drowning man's cry for help as the waters, cold and strong, are closing over his head.

Again he clasped her in his arms, and laid her head on his heart, and kissed her

lips. She clung to him, and a trembling joy came into his blue eyes, which were not dreamy now, but full of a subdued fire, hidden by a mist of tears. His heart melted like wax in the fire ; yet all the time strange, wild legends crossed his brain, of holy hermits who had succumbed to the beauty and the caresses of fiends in the shape of lovely women. He was not a holy hermit, and Elfrida was not a fiend—yet——

The storm was now abating. Rising, he said, “Let us go home!” and in his tone was the calm of despair.

They walked together silently, side by side. When at last they were in the town, at the point where their paths separated, he suddenly stopped.

“Elfrida, you shall either hear from me or see me to-morrow. I will then tell you what you must do. Now, go home.”

His tone was gentle, but peremptory. In his face, could she have discerned it, there lay a whole world of pain and humiliation.

## CHAPTER VII.

## CROSSING THE RUBICON.

THE night which succeeded this day was a dreadful one to the priest.

Nights of pain and doubt were nothing new to him, yet he had never before had a night like this.

Never before had he felt degraded in his own eyes. That sense of irreparable wrong inflicted on another which we call remorse, and which is the avenging spectre of evil deeds, had never till now haunted his conscience. Never had he had such an alternative before him as at this moment. The

responsibility of choice did not lie now between two systems of speculative belief, but between two lines of action—it would almost seem between two crimes. He could not be passive. To keep the vow to God he had so solemnly made was, he knew well, to choose safety and respectability for himself at the price of despair, perhaps madness, for Elfrida. He pictured the poor child as he had seen her that day, wild, forsaken, desperate, in a world as bleak and pitiless as that blasted desert beaten by the chill, driving rain. He stretched out his arms again, with an irrepressible yearning to protect and comfort her. His heart was ready to break with pity—but not with pity only. No; a strong passion for her beauty and innocence, a thirst for the sweet flattery of woman's love and woman's tenderness, deep as the deepest springs of his

own life, forbade him to thrust from his lips the cup that the Tempter held to them. But was that tempter Satan?

We have all heard that in moments of passion we are apt, if not sure, to be misled—that we do not see things as they are, but through the distorted medium of our feelings. But I must take leave to doubt if, in the moment when feeling is exalted, it is necessarily distorted. Is it not in the hour of death that we receive our truest impression of life? A moment of intense feeling often throws a light upon the puzzles and perils through which we wander, as the lightning illuminates a midnight landscape.

All at once, as if by a flash of inspiration, Frederick Godfrey perceived that that religion which lays snares in man's path, by abolishing the safeguards against the perversion of some of his purest affections and

most unselfish instincts, could not be from God. Outside, the Catholic Church was a fair and faultless logical structure—a very whited sepulchre of the Apostles and prophets; but it was not the first time that the corrupting scent of dead men's bones had suggested itself to the mind of her vowed priest. Now, all the tawdry detail of ritual, all the wearisome inanity of legend, all the childish pointlessness of miracle, rose up in his mind with a feeling of hopeless repulsion and blank unbelief. He was reminded most painfully of the old copy-line, that familiarity breeds contempt. But then the system was so logically impregnable. Yet what if religion were not a system at all?—or, at least, not a system that man can walk round with his scanty knowledge and his brief life? Were the Scriptures a system, or the least like a system?

Renunciation, self-sacrifice—true, these words were potent, substantial; but are we to renounce our affections, or ourselves through our affections? Was it the old Protestant leaven which made him feel suddenly now, as, in his mental anguish, he pressed the sharp iron cross into his bodily flesh, that such discipline was vain—that all the waste of time, health, strength, all the self-inflictions of hunger, weariness, dirt, must in the eyes of the Father of Spirits be only hideous, except in so far as they were pitiable?

But to quit this creed to which he had made such sacrifices—to quit it under such circumstances; to make himself a mark for the scorn of the world—for the loathing of good men, and the derision of the vulgar crowd! Who would believe, Catholic or Protestant, that he had abjured his new

faith from any but the lowest motives? Was this to be the end of all the ambitious dreams and high aspirations of his happy and successful youth? Amid the universal wreck nothing would remain to him but the sweet burden of Elfrida's love and helplessness. Nothing but this, and the knowledge that he had done right—that is, if it was right. An instant ago, when he looked at the sacrifices, he had believed it was right; now again, as his soul and his senses succumbed afresh to the remembrance of her fascinations, he doubted—he doubted himself. But if he were to send her away. The idea, for a moment admitted, brought vividly before him her look, her cry when he had said they must never meet again. The thought of her anguish was not to be contemplated. What was the use of thinking of reason and conscience? He *could* not do it.

When the Autumn morning broke, it found him still pacing his forlorn little parlour. He drew up the blind. The bleak, watery dawn fell upon his countenance, which was grey and exhausted. He shivered, as people do when morning comes and finds them still busy with the labour or the suffering of the day which is past. Suddenly he sat down in the old leather arm-chair, and buried his face in his hands. They were cold and damp, like the brow which rested on them. His head and his heart ached to distraction. All the time he had not prayed. Words and forms seemed futile. He felt, too, that he could not ask to be guided. He had an inward, though unacknowledged consciousness that what he should do was already decided, and that all these struggles, though they took the form of argument, were but the spasms of the

soul, as it recoils from a leap which it is, nevertheless, bound to accomplish. Now, however, his whole being rose in an inarticulate cry for compassion and strength.

He tried to set his face to the new future which lay before him. He sought no repose, but busied himself till the ordinary hour for the household to be astir, in looking over and arranging papers and letters. Then he rang for hot water, made his toilet, and ordered a cup of strong tea.

In the afternoon he went to Elfrida's lodgings. The poor child had passed a sleepless night, and a long, anxious morning; but her anxieties had not the complicated nature of his. They hinged solely on his will. What if he should repeat the command for their separation?

He looked so pale and grave, as she rose eagerly to receive him, that she feared the

worst, and sat down again trembling and speechless. He seated himself on the opposite side of the fire, for, on this cold, raw morning, Mrs. Green, with a little unacknowledged feeling of remorse, which exhibited itself in unusual attentions, had had a fire lighted for Elfrida.

“Elfrida!” His voice was husky. It was so difficult for him to speak; but the mute, tearful face raised so meekly to his, gave him courage. “My poor child,” he said, “if you do not already know it, it is my duty to tell you that there is but one alternative before us, and it is for you to choose. Either this is the last time we meet, or—you must become my wife.” He dared not look at her, but he felt that she started violently.

“But you are a priest,” she said, faintly. He did not immediately answer. When

he spoke, it was to say in a firmer tone :

“Elfrida, question your own heart, and answer truly. The peace you have often told me you have lately found, have you found it, think you, in the Catholic Church ? or have you found it in the comfort I have been able to give you ? If you marry me, and there is no other way, we shall both be ex-communicate. I dare not conceal it from you. Your choice lies between the church and me.”

“You would not ask me to risk my soul,” her voice was low and tremulous. “Oh, Mr. Godfrey” (she no longer called him “Father”), “you would not bring all those dreadful agonies I read about in Father Faber’s book, and that I once saw in pictures, upon me, for ever and ever !”

“God forbid, my poor, poor child ! God

forbid, above all things, that *I* should injure *you* !”

As Frederick Godfrey spoke, his vision became clearer and clearer.

“Let us try to lead a pure and honest life—not thinking much of our own happiness. The more we think about our work, Elfrida, the less about our reward, the better. That must be what is meant by finding our life if we lose it. But I must not conceal from you that your life with me will probably be a life of hardship ; for a time, certainly of poverty, perhaps of disgrace. Can you bear it ?”

“Stay with me always—tell me what I ought to do, for you know best. I care for nothing else. Then I am safe.”

“Elfrida,” he cried, once more losing his self-command, and clasping her to his

heart, "may God make me not altogether unworthy of such perfect trust !"

He said no more, but he thought of what would have become of her if he had turned his back upon her ; or, supposing he did not marry her, and yet had continued her counsellor and confessor ! He knew how this position had long been a crying scandal to Protestantism. He knew, too, how the sin to which such associations have led was, in the eyes of his church, less heinous than that breach of his vows he was about to commit by marriage.

But all that fell from him now. He did not reason it out. He saw, as we see the sun and the stars shine, that it was wrong and false.

They sat down again, as Frederick Godfrey said, to make their arrangements, but, in reality, for him to make them. It was

not a very long conversation, for his mind, rapid as well as lucid, when once made up, had already arranged a plan.

The church of the parish in which Elfrida and the priest both lived, was situated in the most crowded part of Smokeham, and there was nearly every Sunday, and more especially in the Autumn—the marrying season, as every clergyman knows—a long list of banns to be published. Elfrida was to go herself to the clerk's house after dark on the Saturday evening to enter their banns. They were to be married on the Monday morning after they were “out of ask,” and sail the same afternoon from Liverpool for New York, in a vessel in which their passage should be taken.

Elfrida acquiesced in everything. She was happy. He would be with her for ever, to love her and to decide for her. The mis-

givings of conscience, the fear of the future, the shrinking from obloquy, which distracted his heart even in the midst of a delight which stung him in every nerve, lay far beyond her knowledge. He felt that it did, and he said to himself that he rejoiced that that innocent heart was spared the complicated feelings which distracted his own. That utter abandon of love and trust which understood and sought for nothing, and cared for nothing but the assurance of his protection and approbation, was full of the sweetest flattery.

But an unacknowledged feeling lay at his heart, as he passed out into the dusk of the Autumn afternoon. How lightly she seemed to estimate his sacrifice ! It was of her own eternal welfare only she had spoken. Poor Frederick ! He had always acted and suffered

alone. Such must still be his destiny—not a singular one for the higher-hearted among men and women.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## AT A LAWN-PARTY.

IT had been a dreary, oppressive Summer to Helen Godfrey. The days had seemed endlessly long, and sickeningly bright, and, oh! so uniform. Was her whole life to be like this?—her only object to hide her suffering from the eyes of her mother?—her only hope that it might some day, when she was old, perhaps, deaden into apathy? The feelings grow blunt as one grows old. At least, she hoped they did.

In the midst of all her sufferings she never doubted him—never, at least, but in brief

flashes, when pain seemed almost to craze her. But she doubted everything else. An unsolved mystery surrounded him, which weighed like a nightmare on her thoughts. In the long anguish of

“The hope that keeps alive despair,”

she never ceased to torment herself with painful solutions which her imagination bodied forth with irrepressible activity, only varied by gleams of the wildest hope, sure to issue in a re-action of despondency.

She and Lady Page had had many consultations about finding some occupation for her, but not altogether with success. She did, indeed, seek to find relief in visiting and helping the poor. Lady Page was one of the most liberal of persons, but she did not possess that success in gaining the confidence of the poor, which is either a gift or an

early habit, and which, strange as it may seem, is rarely possessed by those who have themselves risen from an inferior class. But Helen, who had been trained from childhood in the work of charity, became her friend's almoner. Many a weary hour she beguiled by bringing food and hope to some hungry family. Often the smart at her own heart would be dulled for an hour as she read aloud to some bedridden soul, whose bravely-borne anguish made her feel ashamed of her own unhappiness. But misery refuses to be cured by the mere conviction of the fact that it is either wrong or foolish, or by the very questionable reason for thankfulness, that other people are worse off.

These occupations served only to beguile an uneasy hour, not to engross her mind. Then she thought she would study—something that would require severe attention.

She would try mathematics. She had heard of people who were so engrossed by mathematical problems that all that was most worthy of human endeavour could be represented to them by black lines, and small letters in italics, on a sheet of paper. It had always seemed a mystery to her. She would try to solve it. Now, what Helen undertook she never undertook feebly.

“I think,” she said one day, to Lady Page, “mathematics might answer, if there was any chance of my being senior wrangler; but one cannot get so much interested in anything which one can never make any use of. I am afraid women’s universities won’t be established in time for me to have a chance of being appointed mathematical professor.”

A smile passed sadly over her face. She worked hard to be cheerful.

“My poor dear!” said Lady Page; but she durst say no more, for if she had spoken another word, it would have been in a burst of wrath at Laurence West. She quite hated that flirting clerk, and at such moments would gladly have done him an injury.

Mrs. Godfrey had long given up visiting any but her most intimate friends. But Lady Page took Helen everywhere with her. Each visit that she made was an effort to Helen; but heroine as she was, she did not flinch from making it. She was eager that no one should suspect she was out of spirits—her most hopeful symptom, Lady Page thought. Her ladyship had been quite sanguine that during the Autumn course of visiting Helen would fall in love with some one else. There were several agreeable and gentlemanly young clergymen for instance, permanently to be met with, and Autumn

brought home one or two young squires and their visitors, officers on leave, or barristers in the long vacation, attracted by the prospect of partridges, and parties without the gêne of town re-unions. Helen took her part at these parties—felt even a pleasant freedom in them, after the splendid awkwardness of Belvidere Mansion. But though generally liked, no one fell over head and ears in love with her, and still less did she seem inclined to give to any of them the place, as Lady Page thought, so unworthily usurped by the clerk.

“How strange it is,” thought the good lady, “after seeing all these nice young men, she should still think of the clerk! It is really the most incomprehensible infatuation.”

“But, my dear,” Lady Page ventured to say on one of those rare occasions which had

led to the mention of his name, "even if you were to see him again, what could be the result? You could not marry a person so wholly out of your own class."

"It is cruel of you to speak in that way, Lady Page. If he were a crossing-sweeper, you could not say more. I tell you he is a gentleman."

Lady Page lifted up her eyes and heaved a sigh. She durst allow her thoughts no further expression; but she said to herself—

"The Godfrey obstinacy has a great deal to do with it, I do believe."

One fine September afternoon, Lady Page had taken Helen with her to a lawn party at Oldacres Court. Now Mrs. Green Oldacres was no favourite with Lady Page; but, as she had said herself, it suited her to visit her. She was a stout, middle-aged person, hard

and cold, with the manners of a woman accustomed to society; but wholly without that finer tact which comes from the intuitions of a large or gentle nature. Everybody visited Lady Page, therefore Mrs. Oldacres visited her. It was the thing. "Money makes its way now everywhere," said Mrs. Green Oldacres. She saw no other reason why Lady Page had made her way; but was nevertheless quite resigned to accept her. Having a position of her own, she was by no means very exclusive. Her husband liked Lady Page.

"Her turtle soup is splendid," she said, in an explanatory parenthesis; and she had gratified him by being one of the first to call upon her.

"How do you do, Lady Page?" she said. "How very hot it is! Do have a glass of claret-cup, and tell me if the brew is good.

I know you are a good judge of these things. Tuck," to her son, "do get a glass of claret-cup for Lady Page, and see if there is a vacant mallet for Helen Godfrey."

"Are you playing?" asked Helen.

"No ; there are lots of curates to-day, so I'm off duty."

Helen smiled, as she was expected to do, for are not curates and croquet, perhaps because they both begin with a C, one of the established Joe Millers of society, which a long-suffering public are bound to applaud, in spite of the nausea naturally created by its stale feebleness.

But a mallet could not be found for Helen, whether on account of the predominance of "the inferior clergy," or because the laity were for that day encroaching on their privileges, we need not inquire. Lady Page had disappeared into a group of elder-

ly persons, and Helen sat down on a garden seat, to watch a game which was going on.

Oldacres Court, though perhaps without much characteristic scenery, was a pretty place. What place indeed can fail to be pretty with smooth bright turf, on which the shadows of tall trees rest softly, and through which lies the stately march of a noble river? The house had been built at the ugly period, probably during the reign of the earlier Georges. Still it had a look of substantial comfort, and was old enough, if not to be "venerable," at least to avoid the reproach of anything resembling mushroom newness.

That the ground was perfectly flat was perhaps its greatest fault, but even in this feature there was a certain harmony, and then the lawns were so charming for croquet and archery! Nobody's lawn parties

went off better than Mrs. Green Oldacres'.

Helen sat down alone, but she had not been seated above a minute or two when a middle-aged—almost elderly lady and gentleman came out of a shrubbery, and advanced towards the seat on which she was sitting.

“You had better rest now, I think,” said the gentleman, with a certain grave tenderness in his tone, and a yet stronger expression of the same nature in his face. The lady was a fair, matronly-looking woman; but with an anxious, expectant look in her eyes, as if they were always watching for something. Helen felt vaguely interested. At present, she was more than ordinarily drawn to all who were not happy.

“Shall I find a cup of tea for you?” the gentleman asked. The lady acquiesced,

and he was moving away, when she suggested :

“ Perhaps this young lady would like one too.”

Helen declined. The gentleman was polite, but it was quite evident at the same time that he hardly observed her. Not so the lady. Reconnoitring Helen after her husband had gone, she soon began :

“ This is the first party I have been at for years—but my husband said it was not right for me to shut myself up for ever, and Mrs. Green Oldacres was so kind in pressing me to come for a few days. I dare say it will do me good.” Her eyes filled with tears.

Helen felt a little awkward. She could only look sympathising and say, “ Variety was generally good.” It appeared very odd that anyone could be so open to a

stranger. It almost seemed as if she were a little vain of her sorrow, whatever it might be.

After a few minutes' silence, Helen remarked that Oldacres Court was a pretty place.

"Yes, very pretty in its way; but the ground is so unbroken; it wants variety, and there is no architecture in the house. But I dare say I am fastidious. Our own place is so very——" And she brightened up with a little air of superiority, and then added, "I wish you could see our place—Thorleigh Court, I mean."

"Thorleigh Court!" cried Helen Godfrey.

"Yes; you don't know it, do you?"

"No, but my brother had a friend at college whose home——"

She stopped, for her companion's face be-

came agitated, but with an agitation, it almost seemed, she did not care to hide.

“Tell me, dear, what was your brother’s name. You cannot imagine the reason I have to be so interested.”

“His name is Frederick Godfrey.”

“I thought so—I thought so. He was to have come to see us. How strange that I should meet you! It is so interesting—you cannot guess how interesting it is to me. Ah! Miss Godfrey, all is so changed.”

“Perhaps,” said Helen, “you do not know that my brother has become a Roman Catholic priest?”

“Ah!” with a head-shake and again a little air of superiority; for certain natures feel even their misfortunes as a distinction. “I wish my son were a Roman Catholic priest, or anything, or anywhere, so that I could only know that he was living; or

even if he were dead, I think—yes, I think I could bear that better than the dread that he may be alive in misery and want, and I not there to comfort him. My own boy! He used to be so good and beautiful!” And the tone of superiority passed into one of unfeigned anguish. But she quickly recovered herself. “There is Mr. Wynford coming,” she said, and she appeared anxious he should not notice her agitation. “I am so glad to have seen you, Miss Godfrey, and I must see more of you. See, they are looking for you to play croquet.”

When the carriage came for Lady Page and Helen, Mrs. Wynford came forward to bid her good evening, and to ask to be introduced to Lady Page. Mr. Wynford also shook hands with her; he did not speak a word beyond the simple ordinary saluta-

tion, and his manner had the same reserve which had struck her at first, yet she fully understood that he too meant to be friendly.

On the way home Lady Page related to her the history of the Wynfords, which she had just heard from Mrs. Green Oldacres. They had had an only son, whom they had spoilt dreadfully, and who had turned out very ill, gone to the bad altogether, as might have been expected, from the ridiculous way in which he had been brought up.

“But I don’t think,” said Helen, “that can be altogether true, as I know he was a friend of Frederick’s at Oxford, and that is the last kind of young man Fred would have made a friend of.”

Lady Page shook her head.

“I don’t know what you mean by shaking your head, Lady Page.”

“My dear, you know Frederick is a priest, and one cannot tell what motives—”

“I am sure he had no motive except the ordinary motive.”

“Well, you may be right ; and Mrs. Green Oldacres did tell me that his mother assigns a terrible disappointment in love as the cause of all his misconduct. But that she considers all stuff and nonsense. People don't go mad for love now-a-days, and the heir to a fine property like the Wynfords' does not go a-begging. So she said—Mrs. Green Oldacres is such a hard woman.”

“Poor fellow !” said Helen.

“Poor father and mother ! However it may have been, one feels heart-sorry for them—perhaps more sorry if they have been to blame.”

Helen made no answer. She was sorry for the father and mother, more especially

when she thought of their countenances; but the history and uncertain fate of the son appealed to her feelings with a strong romantic interest. All the evening, and when she woke in the night, it recurred to her thoughts. She began even to build little castles in the air for the benefit of the Wynfords, all ending in their son coming back, like a wandering prince in a fairy-tale, and their all being happy for ever after.

The next day Helen felt less heavy-hearted than she had done for a long time, possibly because she had been less self-occupied. In the afternoon Mrs. Green Old-acres' carriage drew up at the door of Mrs. Godfrey's cottage, and that lady herself, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Wynford, was ushered in.

“Our friends have fallen in love with your daughter,” said Mrs. Green Oldacres, when she had introduced her visitors.

Mrs. Godfrey smiled with dignified pleasure. What could be more natural than that anybody should fall in love with Helen? Gratifying as it was, it was only Helen’s due.

“I have been telling them all about her,” said Mrs. Green Oldacres; “and what a good daughter she has been.”

While his wife talked to Helen, Mr. Wynford conversed with Mrs. Godfrey. They seemed to get on well together. Though his face did not lose its ordinary grave, pre-occupied look, there was respect and approbation in his manner. He had come for the purpose of sitting in judgment; and Mrs. Godfrey’s dignified manner, staunch principles, and unbending propriety of sen-

timent, were all after his own heart.

In the meantime, Mrs. Wynford was overflowing to Helen. She was perhaps, not exactly, under other circumstances, the woman likely to have fascinated that somewhat fastidious young lady; but the latter was no doubt flattered by the "fancy" she had taken for her, and deeply drawn towards her by pity. "So many years of anxiety," thought Helen. "I wonder she has been able to live."

Helen was too young yet to know through how much it is possible to live.

When Mrs. Wynford, at the close of the visit, gave her a pressing invitation to return to Thorleigh Court, she was much inclined to accept it. This inclination was confirmed when the Squire added with grave sincerity, addressing Mrs. Godfrey,

"It would indeed be a great kindness to

my wife if you could spare us your daughter for a little while."

It was settled she was to return with the Wynfords in a few days.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THORLEIGH COURT.

ON the afternoon of a pleasant September day, the carriage met the Wynfords and Helen Godfrey at a small wayside station about twelve or fourteen miles from Thorleigh Court.

By gentle degrees they made the ascent to the wolds, now richly studded with sheaves of corn, and joyous with the life of harvest. If Helen missed the noble timber and the rich leafiness of her native plains, she vaguely felt the greater impressiveness

of the wider horizons, the more suggestive stimulus of the distant landscape, seen, yet unrevealed. The wayside flowers were not her old favourites of the vale, but wilder and freer, like their native air. From the tall banks, as she passed, the blue harebell, and the scabeus, and the purple foxglove seemed to nod a welcome in the breezy sunshine of the harvest afternoon. Her heart was less heavy already. It seemed to her as if she had been looking at life through a crape veil.

In the old half-childish days, when life had seemed a vast region of blissful possibilities, seen through a mist of hope, Helen had cultivated sadness at times as a poetic luxury. She had fancied, as she read Mr. Carlyle's heart-stirring deliverances, or Longfellow's soothing cadences, that she could do very well without being "happy;" and

that to "labour and to wait" would not be impossible.

But to wait without labouring—without any of the conscious dignity of suffering in a worthy cause, or in any cause at all, is a "fate" it is difficult to have "a heart for." Now, though happiness—by nobody but a poet or a Divine of the last century, or a Utilitarian philosopher of our own day—can ever be recognised as "our being's end and aim," yet is it not the deepest natural longing of every child of man? We can "do without it," we can even voluntarily give it up for a "better end and aim," and sooner or later mankind applauds those—justly applauds those who so renounce it. But my heart goes out towards the common, involuntary sufferer who has to bear unsought the unequal pressure of life—whose days, as they come and go, are but an

ignoble, purposeless burden, and whose load not a soul perceives. What right have we to expect to be happy? asks the writer of vast genius already named. None, certainly—no right, only a longing; boundless as desire, intense as life.

The carriage was now at the top of a high bank, at the foot of which the mountain stream wound, like the arc of a bow, round the lawns of Thorleigh Court. It looked now much as it had once looked, on another September afternoon, in the eyes of a certain homeless wayfarer. There was the same rippling shadow on the stream in the foreground, the same glitter as it came rushing down the valley behind, the same sunshiny stillness on the high-wooded slopes, and on the tall, twisted chimneys.

“A haunt of ancient Peace.”

As the carriage drew up in front of the porch, Helen stepped into the hall, which was ornamented in the ordinary style of halls, with shields and antlers and foxes' brushes, and even possessed the dignity of two suits of armour, a feeling took possession of her—a feeling such as the Germans call an *Ahnung*, the French a presentiment—that her visit here would set a mark upon her future.

A few days' experience, however, inclined her to smile at this feeling. If life was monotonous at Marshborough, its monotony at Thorleigh Court was of a character more utterly negative. There were fewer people to see, and no little household cares to occupy, no little economical contrivances to practise, such as give interest to lives which have nothing greater to interest them. Notwithstand-

ing, Helen did not feel dull. She began to take an interest in her host and hostess, and more especially in the former, grave, taciturn and undemonstrative as he was. Mr. Wynford, or "the Squire," as everybody called him at Thorleigh, was most punctual in fulfilling what he conceived to be the duties of his station. He was exemplary in attending to all claims upon him as a landlord, a magistrate, a poor-law guardian, a road-trustee. His day was pretty well portioned out among his numerous duties, about all of which he went with a certain energy and determination, yet without the slightest appearance of enjoyment. He had his amusements, too, in due season—his political newspaper reading, his partridge and pheasant shooting, his occasional hare-coursing and fox-hunting. But even his amusements did not seem to be entered into

as pleasures, but as duties in another form. All that beseemed an English country gentleman, Mr. Wynford would do, or die. Now this model of propriety seemed hardly the sort of person to interest a young girl ; but romantic Helen, with the knowledge she possessed, could see that his whole life was one long endurance ; and for uncomplaining endurance she had the Godfrey respect.

She wished—she wished fervently she could do something for Mr. Wynford, and the mental occupation produced by the wish was a relief to herself.

It was easier to be of use to Mrs. Wynford. To be listened to and admired was, to her, some alleviation for every possible evil. Then it was an evident enjoyment to show Helen all her possessions, from the still-room to the garret ; from the conservatory to the poultry-yard and the pigs. In all these

things, or, at least, in exhibiting them, she had evidently a genuine enjoyment. The anxious look would vanish from her face, her eyes would light up with pleasure, till some sudden association would again fill them with tears.

Finding that Helen was not only a patient but a willing listener, she spoke, when they were alone, almost constantly of her lost son. Anecdotes of his childhood, reminiscences of his boyhood, tales of his prowess, and proofs of his talents, she poured out with such memory as love alone possesses. Then she had quite a museum of relics—his tiny first shoes, his various toys, his lathe, a box he had himself turned for her. Some tradition was attached to each article. Helen almost wondered at the strength of her own interest.

“I think, dear Helen,” said Mrs. Wynford

one day, "I have now shown you everything but his portrait. It used to hang over the chimney-piece in my morning-room, but my husband had it taken down. He cannot bear to see anything that belonged to him, and he never speaks of him. So it now hangs up in his—I mean my dear child's—bed-room, of which I always keep the key myself. I often go there, but never when Mr. Wynford is in the house. These are the happiest moments of my life, and when I see my darling's face, and everything in his room just as it used to be, I feel that this cruel, cruel separation cannot last for ever. Oh, Helen!" and the poor mother lifted her eyes, intense with a longing which bordered on despair."

"Helen," she said more calmly, "you shall see it to-morrow. It is too late to-day. My husband will soon be in. To-morrow he

is going to the Board of Guardians, and we shall have some hours to ourselves."

Now that this exhibition of the portrait had been arranged, it would have been difficult to say whether Mrs. Wynford or her guest was the most anxious for its accomplishment.

Helen could not account to herself for the interest she felt. She even lay awake thinking of it; and when, at last, the morning came, and Mr. Wynford, as it seemed to her after unusual delays, had fairly ridden off, she found herself at the door of the chamber, with bated breath and a beating heart, as if approaching a crisis of her fate. So Bluebeard's wife might have felt when the fatal key was in the lock, and another moment would solve the mystery.

It was a large and pleasant chamber, brightly and comfortably furnished, and the

walls hung with landscapes in water-colours. But Helen only received a general impression of size and cheerfulness. Her eye sought eagerly for the object she had come to see.

There it was, on her right hand as she entered. Her heart leapt up with a wild, tumultuous bound, and for a second all the objects in the room swam before her eyes. Yet she was not surprised. It was what she now felt she had all along expected to see.

The portrait represented a lad of eighteen or nineteen, in the very bloom of youth—a boy rather than a man—of bright complexion and joyous presence. No countenance could have more fully expressed honesty and fearlessness. Yet, though it was the same face she knew so well (how could she mistake it?), it lacked that look of power and purpose which is born of passions mastered and work accomplished,

and in which Helen Godfrey had felt that she could find strength and peace.

She was yet looking at the face, which might have stood for an ideal type of youth, unconscious of everything but the magnitude of the happiness which had come upon her, when Mrs. Wynford laid her hand on her shoulder and said,

“Is he not a noble creature? Can you believe——”

With a sudden impulse, as if that poor mother's pride and suffering had been only then fully revealed to her, Helen threw her arms round her.

“No—dear Mrs. Wynford, never believe it! He is a noble creature still. You will be proud of him yet. I know it;” and in the energy of her feelings she burst into tears.

“Dear, dear Helen!” said Mrs. Wyn-

ford, "I wish—O how I wish——" Then she stopped suddenly, the old shadow coming over her face; but she was very tender to Helen.

All the rest of that day Helen Godfrey felt as if the world she inhabited were no longer that grey and sunless scene of uselessness it had so lately seemed. Hope had returned to her heart. Colour and purpose had come back to her life.

"What a handsome girl Miss Godfrey is!" said the Squire, as she had stepped out on the lawn from the drawing-room window, just before dinner. "Somehow it never struck me till this afternoon what a really lovely face she has."

Helen was at that moment admiring a fine holly-hock. The flush of the Autumn sunset was full upon her countenance, and surrounded her dark hair like a glory. Her

lithe figure, in its soft white drapery, and happy elasticity of movement, looked, in the rose-red atmosphere of that September evening, the very crown and completion of the scene.

“I wish she were always here,” said Mrs. Wynford.

“Poor Lucy! I wish indeed you *had* had a daughter,” was her husband’s response. Bitterness mingled with the tenderness of his tone. Mrs. Wynford knew the bitterness was not for her, yet it pierced her heart.

“Oh, Henry!” She said no more, but he knew what she meant as well as if she had uttered a volume. He only looked at her with grave tenderness, muttering, “*Corruptio optimi fit pessimi*,” then walked out into the garden with a face grave still, but anything rather than tender.

Notwithstanding that the Squire was almost gloomy all the evening, Helen felt supremely happy. Did she not possess a secret to dispel that gloom? For a moment she had felt tempted to disclose her secret. She was bound by no promise. True; but all the more did she feel that silence was a sacred obligation. She went to bed thinking how pleasant it would be, as Mrs. Wynford had proposed, to stay some weeks longer. She revolved plans in her mind for cheering these kind friends. An occasional thought, too, of a possible future would glance across her mind like a glimpse of Paradise. But that vision was too bright to be steadily contemplated. That hope was hidden away in her heart, not even to be looked at.

She stole quite an hour from her sleep in drawing out a little programme of what

would happen, and what she would do and say during the remainder of her visit. Foolish Helen! She had forgotten the hackneyed proverb—hackneyed because so true, that “L’homme propose, &c.”

By the next night Helen Godfrey was far away from Thorleigh Court. A different work claimed her.

## CHAPTER X.

## AN UNEXPECTED GUEST.

ON that same evening on which Mr. Wynford had discovered in Helen Godfrey a hitherto unnoticed beauty, Lady Page was sitting alone in her large, panelled drawing-room in the College Green. It was a comfortable, old-fashioned room, having been one of the prebendal houses in the "good old days," before the Ecclesiastical Commission had made havoc of the stalls. The red light had faded from the topmost pinnacle of the cathedral tower, and

the ivy-green in the shadier nooks had deepened into an ebony blackness. Within the room it was almost dark, for though it had three windows, they were small and deeply recessed, the fire had burnt itself out almost to ashes, and the furniture as grave in colour as it was rich in texture, absorbed rather than reflected the glimmer of light yet remaining. Lady Page had been sitting in one of the windows, watching the red glow creep upwards on the tower, and thinking how glad she was that Helen Godfrey was forgetting "that clerk," when she was startled by a double knock at the house door. She was yet speculating on the possibility of a visitor at that late hour, when her wheezy, confidential butler handed her a small card, and informed her "the gentleman wished very particularly to see her on business, if she were disengaged." Lady

Page took the card into the window, and, to her great astonishment, read—

*Mr. Laurence West.*

“Show him up,” she said; and her tone had a thrill of virtuous indignation. How glad she was Helen was not at home! It was, however, with a feeling of eager curiosity that she awaited his entrance.

Footsteps made scarcely a sound on Lady Page’s thickly-carpeted stairs, and she had only achieved lighting the gas, the better to criticize his fascinations, which she suspected of having something sinister in them, when the butler threw wide the door, and announced “Mr. West!”

The door was in the full blaze of the five gaslights, all of which she had lighted. She had placed herself in an attitude of dignified surprise, where she could best see the stranger

as he entered. But at the first glance a good deal of the dignity vanished, and little but the surprise remained. In her heart of hearts she wondered no longer at Helen Godfrey, as the winsome countenance of her unwelcome guest met her critical eyes. But it was with anything but pleasure that Lady Page made this admission to herself. She was quite disappointed that Mr. West was so unlike the handsome, pert, vulgar youth her imagination had painted him. At this moment there was an eager, self-forgetting look in his eyes, an unconscious self-possession in his manner, which seemed the result rather of being wholly engrossed by his purpose than of any overweening confidence in himself.

“Lady Page,” he said, “when I have explained the reason of my presence here, you will, I am sure, understand how it is that I

have had no time for ceremony. I have heard of you so frequently as the dearest friend of Miss Godfrey, that I apply to you now in a painful matter, which intimately concerns her. I place it in your hands, and will act as you advise." He paused, evidently moved.

In spite of herself, Lady Page believed and trusted him.

"For Heaven's sake," she said, "what is the matter? Sit down, Mr. West."

"You know Mr. Frederick Godfrey——"

"I know all about him, and the grief he brought upon his family." Her tone was severe.

"Let God judge him!" said Laurence West, seeming to speak with some difficulty. "I fear, Lady Page, he is about to bring upon them a greater grief—a disgrace, if he is not—if we cannot manage to avert it. I felt

I should rather explain it to you than to Miss Godfrey. It seems for some time past he has been the confessor of a young lady—a beautiful girl, whom he had in the first place persuaded to embrace his own creed. Since her mother's death, she has had no friend or adviser but himself, and now I am informed," he spoke breathlessly, as if eager to have done with a painful duty, "they have arranged to fly together to America, in a vessel which sails the day after to-morrow. There is no time to be lost."

His voice now fairly broke down. His distress altogether appeared, even granting he was Helen's lover, greater than his personal interest in the occasion warranted; but it was evidently unfeigned. A more natural young man Lady Page had never seen. But all this she rather felt than consciously noted. The magnitude of the crisis

was to her, too, overwhelming. She looked eagerly at Laurence West, as if she had hoped to gather some helpful suggestion from his countenance.

“Will you consult with Miss Godfrey?” he said.

“Helen is not at home. She is paying a visit in the country.”

“Not at home! How soon could we—time presses.”

“She is far from a station—and not many trains—the place is called Thorleigh Court.”

She was still looking anxiously at him. All at once his eyes fell, and his hand, which lay on the table under the gaslight, trembled visibly. For some seconds he made no rejoinder. When he spoke, his voice was much calmer than it had yet been, but it seemed not so natural:

“Could not we send for her? I fancied that it might be best for her to go herself to her brother; and she must start to-morrow, and being Sunday there is only one train. Stay, there is a station nearer than Marshborough. Could she not leave Thorleigh Court to-morrow morning, and go straight to Smokeham? It may be fortunate after all. It would not be necessary then to tell Mrs. Godfrey.”

“Will you go to Thorleigh Court, Mr. West?”

Again he was silent, and as Lady Page reflected, it did appear to her it would be very awkward for Helen. Had he not come to her to avoid this very embarrassment. Every moment he was rising in her estimation, though greatly against her will.

“I will go with you,” she suddenly said.  
“I will order the carriage for four o’clock in

the morning. We can drive by the hill road all the way. We shall be there by breakfast time, and at the station by eleven o'clock, in good time for the Smokeham train."

"Thank you, thank you, dear Lady Page," cried the young man, rising and taking her hand in both of his; "I——"

At that moment Lady Page fully understood Helen Godfrey. It was a face, beyond all the faces she had ever seen, to trust and love—tenderness in the honest, blue eyes, and purpose in the firm yet somewhat full lips. And this abandonment, with which he threw himself in trust on others, at least on her, was very winning.

"And now," she said, "you must have some supper, and we must go to bed, as we have to rise so early;" and her ladyship's heart migave her just a little as she thought of the unparalleled exertion. Everything

went on like clock-work at Lady Page's. Nothing was ever hurried or out of place. Life, so to speak, was cushioned with velvet, and moved upon patent rollers.)

"But it will do me good," thought Lady Page, with desperate resolve; "all this luxury makes one lazy and selfish."

The command for supper, and a bed for the stranger, was not esteemed out of the way in the servants' hall, but had a torpedo suddenly fallen into that sanctum of respectable laziness, greater astonishment could not have been felt than when the carriage was ordered for four the next morning, and coffee and eggs to the bedrooms before starting.

Lady Page was never more at home than when she was exercising hospitality. Laurence West had had nothing to eat all day, and she found herself, she hardly knew how,

helping him, waiting on him, and making him comfortable, as if he had been her own son, who had come home tired and hungry. The strangest thing was that he received all her attentions without the least fuss, as if they came to him quite naturally, and with the gratitude only which consists in enjoying them.

It was very strange. A paper-bag maker's clerk! A mere adventurer! Who, what was he? Nor did he seem at all vain of his interest in Helen Godfrey. He seemed rather to avoid the mention of her name. This very reticence convinced Lady Page that he loved her, though whether the conviction made her glad or sorry, she hardly knew.

At the appointed time the next morning her ladyship, in a sealskin jacket, for the Autumn mornings were damp and chilly, duly made her appearance.

“ I declare,” she said, “ I feel quite elated at the idea of how young I am ! I am not so dependent on my dowager ways and comforts as I thought. I hope you slept well, Mr. West.”

She was looking at him again as she spoke, though it was still by gaslight. His slim, firm figure, so easily carried, had a certain air of good breeding, which is rarely bestowed except by early association or conscious position. She was more and more convinced there was some secret attached to him. They were to have a long tête-à-tête drive. Perhaps he would make a confidante of her.

But in this hope she was disappointed. During their journey he gave her an account of the manner in which he had become possessed of the information on which they were now acting.

Mr. Higginson, he said, had been his informant.

“I suppose you are aware Mr. Higginson has purchased an estate in the country. Now this place in former days belonged to the father of the young lady with whom Godfrey, poor fellow——”

“Poor fellow !” cried Lady Page, indignantly, “you forget, Mr. West, he has been false to his family, false to his religion, and——”

“But not false to his own convictions, I think,” said the young clerk boldly.

“His convictions !” Lady Page repeated, in a tone severely contemptuous. “Is morality a mere thing of convictions ?”

“God forbid that I should even seem to say so ; but there is a personal knowledge of a man’s character which supersedes the evidence of all appearances ; and I know

that Frederick Godfrey is true, beyond all men."

"Mr. West ! I beg pardon, but did *you* ever know Mr. Frederick Godfrey?"

She tried to look at his face in the struggling light of the early dawn. It was confused, even distressed.

"Yes, I knew him. But perhaps you will kindly excuse further explanation now, as I am anxious, for the present, to be silent with regard to my past life. I may trust you, I feel certain."

To say that Lady Page was consumed with curiosity would hardly be exaggerating the truth ; but she gave the promise his words seemed to demand, and he continued his narrative.

"There is a clergyman at Mr. Higginson's place——"

"Willesmere," put in Lady Page.

“Yes, Willesmere——a meddling, supercilious bigot,”—the young man spoke bitterly—“and this fellow it is who has made the discovery. It seems he has long set a secret watch on the actions both of the girl and Godfrey.”

“I don’t blame him for that.”

“I do blame him, He wants to revenge himself on Frederick, and make a great man of himself. The public exposure we seek to avoid is exactly what he desires. This is what we must prevent.”

“You are right, Mr. West, we must prevent it, for Mrs. Godfrey’s sake, and for— for Helen’s sake.”

“For Helen’s sake,” he repeated tenderly; “yes, for Helen’s sake.”

After that, they travelled for some time in silence. They stopped to feed the horses at a little inn in the village near which the

station was situated. Here Laurence West got out of the carriage, saying,

“I shall wait here—at the station, I mean—till you return from Thorleigh Court. It will be better for you to go alone for Miss Godfrey.”

It was better, Lady Page felt, for many reasons, yet she had been struck by his manner when he said so.

As she pursued her journey in solitude, wild, romantic ideas, as they seemed to herself, crossed her brain. Lady Page did not readily believe in anything romantic and out of the way, and was inclined to reproach herself now.

Nevertheless, there was a mystery, and there must be a solution.

## CHAPTER XI.

## IN THE TRAIN.

BEFORE noon on the day so early begun by the widow of the Lord Mayor, Helen Godfrey found herself seated opposite to Laurence West, tearing through the green pasture lands and past the rifled orchards of Bloomshire. Her heart beat as if it would burst her bosom, and her cheek was hot with the fever of her soul. What were all their past trials compared with this disgrace? What was disgrace itself even, in comparison with the wickedness of that deed—hideous in the eyes of God and man—by

which her brother, whom she had once thought the best of men, was about to blast the life of a helpless girl? But as the express train sped like a flash past the green meadows and yellowing elm-trees, and rosy heaps of apples in the wayside orchards, which the very same children seemed always putting into the very same barrows, that first blind fever of distress settled down into a calmer, if more conscious grief—a grief which seeks counsel, perhaps consolation.

Few words had been exchanged between Helen and her companion. Only, when they first met at the station, a warm grasp of the hand.

Lady Page had not accompanied them, for her share in the work was done, and it had been arranged that Helen's head-quarters were to be at Belvidere Mansion. Her

last words, as she stood on the platform at the door of the railway-carriage, were,

“If that poor, misguided girl has nowhere else to go, you may bring her to me.”

“God reward you!” said Laurence West, with a fervour which astonished the Lord Mayor’s widow, but repaid her for the sacrifice she had made of her feelings in making the offer.

A silly, love-sick, light-minded pervert! What a companion for sensible, Protestant Lady Page! All the way home, as she leant back a little tired, the kind-hearted, sensible woman pondered in a sort of puzzled way over the events of the last twenty-four hours. At the time she had not thought there was anything to object to in Helen going with Mr. West. Now her mind misgave her that there was an impropriety. If any harm should come of it! Was that wily

clerk corrupting her too? He had even tried to persuade her there might be some excuse for Frederick.

The railway-carriage was nearly full, and, with an occasional change of company, continued to be so from station to station, till the train stopped at the junction for a large town. When they started again from this place, Helen and Mr. Higginson's clerk found themselves, for the first time since the beginning of their journey, alone together.

The engine had snorted, the whistle had shrieked, and, after all the rest of the din due to the occasion, the train had glided out like a huge black serpent, round the curve into the open plain, now beginning to wear that bleak and treeless aspect which lets one gently down into the stern desolation of the black country.

"Helen!" said Laurence West, bending

suddenly forward, a flush on his face, and his eyes falling before hers for a moment, "you have been at Thorleigh Court—you know. Tell me, tell me truly." And now he looked her full in the face with a look honest and ingenuous, if still perturbed.

"They are not happy. They are always thinking—your—Mrs. Wynford was always speaking of——"

"Speaking of—quick—tell me."

"Of her son, of—you."

"Tell me what she says, if she has forgiven—what—what my father says."

"He has said nothing; but, oh, Mr. West!"

"Don't stop, Helen. Reproach me, if you like—only don't forsake me!"

"How can you bear to wring their hearts? Why do you permit them to suffer?"

There was a tremble like indignation in her tone, but it might not have been indignation.

“I wanted to deserve their forgiveness!”

“Forgive me ; but have you any right to think of what *you* want ?”

“None, Helen ; but don’t be hard upon me ! I deserve it ; but from you I cannot bear it.”

“I do not want to be hard. I am not hard—oh, how far from it !” This time the tremble in her voice certainly was not indignation. “But they have been so long unhappy.”

“God forgive me !” he cried. She made no rejoinder to this ejaculation, and a few minutes’ pause succeeded.

“Helen,” he suddenly burst out, “I cannot bear you to think worse of me than I deserve. From the moment I came to my

senses out of that selfish delirium of disappointment, it was the first wish of my soul to humble myself in the dust before them ; but—may I tell you everything ? It would be such a relief ; or do you despise me too much ?”

Helen tried to answer, but she struggled for speech with the impotence of a bad dream. She could only hold out her hand. He caught at it with both of his, as if by that hand he laid hold on his lost life. Passionately he opened his heart to the eager, listening girl. He described his secret visit to Thorleigh Court—what he had seen and heard, and the vow he had then made : how he had sought and striven, often with an all but despairing heart, to fulfil it : how she, when his courage was sinking, had cheered him with her friendly words and brave example.

“When you told me about your home, and all its ways, I saw that you took pleasure in telling me. I was sure, since I could feel with you, that I was not a lost being, and my self-respect returned.”

He stopped. All this time he had continued to hold her hand. Now, with sudden impulse, he kissed it passionately.

“Mr. West!” she cried.

“I am not Mr. West. I am Leigh, if only you will, your Leigh. Helen! Helen!”

The words were a beseeching cry. He saw her make an effort to speak, but instead of speaking, she burst into tears. Helen was not usually weak-nerved. More sorrow, or even more anxiety, she could have borne with at least outward composure; but this joy, which had arisen upon her in the midst of her distress, completely overcame her.

They were skirting the black desert which lay round Smokeham. Over that town hung, in the heavy autumnal air, a dense smoke cloud. They had been long talking together of the errand on which they were bound. The hearts of both were anxious, but even in this common anxiety lay a new and wonderful charm.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE EVE OF A WEDDING-DAY.

THE banns had been duly asked, and the next morning was to witness the marriage and flight of Frederick Godfrey and Elfrida Foxley. Certain circumstances had increased his anxiety to hasten matters. Since their engagement, he had much more frequently gone to visit Elfrida at her lodgings. They had never met at the Chapel again. The honourable soul of Frederick Godfrey revolted at making pretence of the duties of the religion he had forsworn a mask for a course of action it would so loudly

have condemned. During the two or three last visits he had paid to Elfrida, he had always happened, as he went out, to meet Mrs. Green, and on each occasion, in answer to his salutation, she had seemed to toss her head, her whole manner bespeaking scant civility. This was the more remarkable that during the rare occasions on which he had formerly seen her, she had always been friendly and smiling. It seemed odd, too, that he should invariably find her on the stairs. It gave him a feeling of being watched.

On the Saturday before the last Sunday for the publication of the banns, he had not gone many paces from Mrs. Green's door on his way home, when he suddenly found himself face to face with Mr. Summerwood. These two men had only met once before, but each had received too strong an impres-

sion from the other to fail in mutual recognition, wherever and however they should meet again. Neither made any acknowledgment now, as they passed, unless a mutual scowl could be called an acknowledgment

Frederick's first impulse was to return to Elfrida, but the next instant he was inclined to smile at his own folly. Why should Mr. Summerwood's business in Smokeham have any reference to her? He had, Frederick knew from Elfrida herself, an interest in the Anglican "Home." Probably some affair regarding that institution was the cause of his presence. "Conscience makes cowards of us all," he thought. Nevertheless, he watched Mr. Summerwood till he had long passed Mrs. Green's door, and had disappeared at the far end of the semi-deserted street.

Nearer and deeper cares had almost driven the incident out of his head ; but when he stole a few minutes the next morning to pay his last visit at Mrs. Green's, Elfrida rushed into his arms wild with fear, which it seemed at first as if nothing could calm.

" I have had such a night !—oh ! such a night ! You will not wonder——" And she started, and cast her eyes round the room with the look of a hunted hare.

" My dear ! there is no one here." He put his arm round her, and looked in her face with a calmness and cheerfulness he hardly felt.

" I always fancy I hear his footstep coming again."

" Whose footstep ? Summerwood's, do you mean ?"

" Hush ! Oh ! how did you know,

Frederick? Oh! how did you know?"

Still holding her protectingly, he told her how he had seen him, assuring her that it was not in his power to hurt them. Still trembling, she continued, half incoherently:

"I would not see him, I would not let him in. I locked the door. I set the table and chairs against it. At last he went away. I had hoped he was gone; but he soon came back, and pushed this note under the door."

With trembling fingers she took a note from the table, and handed it to him. He took it eagerly, and read:—

"You refuse to see me, because you are ashamed. Like our first parents, when they had sinned, you hide; but they could not hide from God, and you cannot hide from God. Remembering that I have been

the shepherd of your soul, I make an effort to snatch you from the life of sin into which you have been led by a designing and licentious priest. I will not pollute my pen by giving a name to his wickedness; but if you persevere in the course into which he has seduced you, it is my duty to tell you the end will be ruin of body and soul; in this life, misery and degradation; in the next, torments in the lake of fire with the devil and his angels for ever. The Reverend Mother has, at my earnest entreaty, consented to receive you as a penitent at Nunfield. Unhappy girl! be warned while there is yet room for repentance. I wait your answer, and for your own sake would earnestly wish to sign myself,

“Your pastor,

“J. SUMMERWOOD.”

This was a powerful letter, powerful because genuine. The writer evidently believed every word he uttered, and Frederick Godfrey, as he read, was compelled, in spite of himself, to acknowledge that he did.

This, then, was what the world would think of him—not the wicked world only, but the world of conscientious and pious men.

Elfrida watched him as he read, and she saw his lips grow pale and tremble. Her own face whitened with terror.

“Oh! Frederick,” she cried wildly, “is it so very wicked? Shall I go to that awful place, and be tormented for ever?”

“No, Elfrida. Firmly and truly, I believe no.”

“You are not so wicked, are you? You would not make me miserable for ever?”

“By the God who made us both, I would rather, ten thousand times rather, suffer myself to all eternity. Do you doubt it?”

His tone was almost angry. Something in her words had wounded him.

“Oh! no, no!—don’t be angry. Don’t leave me, don’t give me up to Mr. Summerwood and Miss Blagrove!”

“Never, as long as you believe in me.”

“I do believe in you; but you looked so frightened. Forgive me, Frederick!” and she looked in his face with her wondrous innocent eyes, which glistened with tears.

“Forgive *you*, dearest;” and he caressed her with a feeling something like remorse, yet strongly impregnated with a sense of an unsatisfied want. “I cannot forgive myself for not having recanted in the face of the world, before I had united your life with mine. It would have been more manly. The hypo-

crisy of the last fortnight has degraded me."

She looked at him, anxious and puzzled. His words seemed again to intimate that he was not infallible, as she had believed him ; and Elfrida had at all times more faith in assumption than in humility. Though she dared not give utterance to her fears, he read them.

"Elfrida, we have now made up our minds to unite our lives together, in order, I hope, that we may live the more worthily. We, or, at least, I, made a mistake when I supposed God's will was to be discovered in metaphysical speculations or human systems. These have failed to meet our wants, therefore they cannot be from God. Now we go forth hand and hand into the world of God's creatures, there in honesty to do our best, and to learn patiently, per-

haps through our own errors, what the best is. We will not look back on the past, which is irrevocable. You understand, my darling?"

"Ah! you are so good, and wise, and kind."

The authority of his tone, rather than any comprehension of his meaning, had restored her confidence. Peace came back to her great blue eyes and lovely, pale features. He saw that he was re-instated on his pedestal of infallibility; that his words were by this loveliest of women looked up to as the utterances of a god.

Yet it is not always an advantage, flattering though it may be, to be regarded as a god. Frederick, at least at that moment, would have yielded up some of the worship due to his godship, for the humbler satisfaction of being felt for as an equal.

As he left the house, he begged Mrs. Green not to admit any visitor to Miss Foxley that day. She was tired, and wished to be alone.

Then it was that the virtuous indignation of the ex-music teacher, supported as it now was by Mr. Summerwood, burst for that last.

“Had it not been the Lord’s Day,” she said, “the young miss should not have slept another night under her roof. The clergyman who had called last night, and whom Miss Foxley was ashamed (no wonder!) to see, had come to offer her a refuge at the home at Nunfield, and” Mrs. Green thought, “she ought to be too glad to accept it. She did not think much of ritualistic ways herself, but she had never heard otherwise than that the sisters were *respectable* women.” She laid a strong emphasis on the adjective.

This Frederick felt was terrible to bear, and to bear in silence. Elfrida's things were already packed, and after a moment's consideration, he determined she should leave her lodgings that afternoon, instead of remaining till the next morning. He chose a third-rate Commercial Hotel, in the busiest part of the town, as the place of her retreat, thinking her more likely to remain there than anywhere else, undiscovered till the morning. He secured an apartment for himself also in the same rather fusty little place of public reception. What he most dreaded now was that Mr. Summerwood would seek him at his lodgings, and bring down upon them that publicity and scandal they had made so many sacrifices (wrongly he was now convinced) to avoid.

Thus it came to pass that when Leigh Wynford and Helen Godfrey, in the grey

twilight of the Sunday evening, left their hired carriage at the end of the passage and walked up to the door of the little house by the market gardens, the landlady informed them :

“ His reverence was gone out for the night, and she did not know what time he were to be home, but for certain sure some time the next day.”

Recognising Helen, she seemed anxious to give her all the information in her power, but she had evidently little or none to give. Whatever plot might be going on, she had certainly neither hand in it nor suspicion of it.

Leaving Leigh in her brother's little parlour, Helen next proceeded alone to Elfrida's lodgings. Here her worst fears were confirmed by the report of Mrs. Green, who not unnaturally augured the very worst

from the doings of the priest ; “ They have gone off together, I am sure,” she said ; “ she is a poor, silly, useless thing, and he is a thorough Jesuit, with his smooth ways and oily tongue.”

Weary and dispirited, poor Helen returned to Leigh Wynford ; but she made a brave and not unsuccessful effort to bear up. Almost in silence, for it was getting too dreadful to speak of, they drove about from place to place, making inquiries, which ended in nothing. Their hopes became fainter and fainter, like the dusk of the Autumn day, and when the starless darkness of the night fell at last upon the streets, her last hope seemed to have vanished.

But they still drove on and on, to all sorts of places, possible and impossible. It began to feel to Helen as if she were destined thus to drive on for evermore, numbed

with weariness, like one under a spell. At last Leigh said,

“There is nowhere else to go to, and it gets very late.”

“Yes, there is. There are cottages in one of the pit villages that he visits.”

“The collier people will be all in bed by this time.”

“There might be somebody sick or dying. Do not let us lose any chance.”

The light of a street lamp fell on her face.

“You cannot go,” he said. “You are worn out.”

She made a faint attempt to deny it, but the words passed into a sickly smile.

“I will take you to Belvidere Mansion at once,” he said, decidedly, “and then I will go to the pit village myself. Helen, you must trust me to do all—the minutest thing you would have done yourself.”

Yes, she could trust Leigh, even with Fred's misdeeds and her family's honour—with anything and everything. And somehow, without words, for she was too tired for much speech, she managed to convey to him this flattering reliance.

Then, as they drove along the road to Belvidere Mansion, she cried, with sudden vehemence :

“You cannot think—I cannot tell you how grieved I am to bring this distress, this disgrace on you, and this day of all days.”

“Helen,” he said, and for the first time since he had quitted the train he grasped her hand in his own, “I believe, I have always believed, that what Frederick does he thinks is right. To have been his friend and to think otherwise is impossible.”

“Thank you, Leigh. It is the best comfort even you could give me.”

All along Helen had felt the same, but she had not dared to think it, even to herself, till she found that another mind could see it in the same light.

Kind Mrs. Higginson, with an anxious face, was sitting up for them herself when they arrived at Belvidere Mansion. She looked at Leigh, then shook her head mournfully, yet not without a certain depressed satisfaction, as if she were saying to herself, "I was sure how it would be!"—which, indeed, she *was* saying to herself. But she was kind beyond kindness to Helen, hurried her off to the most luxurious of beds in the most comfortable of chambers, administered hot wine and water, and hung over her as if she had been her own child. It was comforting, Helen vaguely felt, though she was too tired to be duly grateful.

Yet, through all her fatigue, through

all her sickness of heart, into her very dreams, she carried the consolation of Leigh's words; and when she awoke, she still seemed to feel the grasp of his hand as he assured her of his belief in Frederick.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE AVENGERS.

MONDAY morning dawned foggy and damp. As it had been arranged the previous night, Helen rose by the earliest peep of day. Leigh Wynford was to meet her at the railway-station in time for the first train to the north. He had ascertained that Frederick had done duty in the chapel on the Sunday. They could not, then, have fled yet. By watching every train, they might still be in time to prevent their elopement. A fly was to be ready to take

Helen to the station. It seemed tacitly understood by the Higginsons, and admitted by Helen, that she was engaged to the clerk. This completely explained to his employer the part he had taken in the painful matter now in hand, and placed Helen's reliance on his help in the right light.

Mr. Higginson, on the day he had gone to Marshborough, had expressed to his whole family the most emphatic approbation of the arrangement.

"A lucky lass she is, and she deserves it."

"What is it?" said Sir Anthony Hayward, startled from the perusal of the Premier's speech at a public dinner by the loud slap on the table with which Mr. Higginson applauded his own utterance.

"My father is only speaking of a match

between two of our people," Lady Hayward explained.

"Ah! butler and lady'smaid—housemaid and groom—something of that sort?"

"No. The head-clerk and the governess, I believe," said Ethel, coldly, her eyes again dropping on her book.

"Oh! quite in high life!" And Sir Anthony resumed his place in the speech, at the Army Estimates.

Augustus, who was present, felt himself colour violently, and walked away to the window. He was glad, yes, he could not but rejoice that he had not married "the governess," but, somehow, it was not pleasant to think she was going to marry "that fellow West" after all. He felt all the evening as if he had been rubbed the wrong way. "What was West but a vulgar, sneaking fellow, a mere adventurer, with a knack

of worming himself into the favour of both man and woman? He hoped he was not taking his father in!" But as this last notion did not seriously disturb the young man, we may surmise that it was an ebullition of his feelings, rather than the suggestion of his judgment.

But to return to Helen, on that raw and chilly Autumn morning. She shivered as she dressed; but not with cold only. Sick with a mingled feeling of dread and impatience, she drove along the well-known road to Smokeham.

The Smokeham streets, with their closed shutters and streaming pavements, had a deserted look, and the great foundries and coal depôts seemed to frown ominously as she passed. It seemed to her then that nothing in life could ever come right.

But when the cab drew up under the

long, dripping portico of the station, and a face appeared at the window, it had an effect on her spirits such as a July sun might have had on the sad-coloured scenery through which she had been passing.

“There will be no train for half an hour, but I knew you would come early.”

Leigh Wynford's smile warmed like sunshine, and Helen's courage, if not her hopes, revived. Yet, notwithstanding his smile, she could see that he, too, was full of anxiety. They spoke very little to each other. To both it was a crisis beyond speech. It was so early that as yet the waiting-rooms were unswept and undusted. Everything looked comfortless and forlorn.

“Let me take you into the refreshment-room, Helen. Perhaps there may be a cup of tea. It may warm you, as there is no fire.”

There was little in the words, but in her inmost soul, through all her depression, stole a sense of something deeper than pleasure. To be thought for, cared for, acted for, to be altogether passive in the hands of one who was tender as well as strong, seemed a delicious repose, after all those years of self-dependence, and months of unshared suffering.

She was trying to swallow the last night's warmed-up tea, and to show her gratitude by looking as if the detestable beverage had done her good, when she was all at once struck by a change in Leigh's countenance.

"What is it?" she cried, starting up, as with a trembling hand she set her tea-cup on the counter.

"It is Summerwood. I saw his face at the door."

“I saw no one. What can he want? Can he have seen them?”

“No. He has not seen them, I am sure. Perhaps his presence here has nothing to do with them. He may be going home.”

The words were barely out of his mouth when a piercing cry—a cry of extremest terror—ran through the station.

With one impulse, Leigh and Helen, and every living soul within hearing, rushed to the platform.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the same moment that Helen Godfrey was wrapping herself in her mantle in her comfortable bedroom in Belvidere Mansion, her brother Frederick was handing Elfrida Foxley into a cab at the door of the Commercial Hotel. She was as pale and as still as a marble statue, except that a scarcely perceptible nervous tremor ran

through her whole frame. He did not tremble, but his face too was pale. He showed none of the proper orthodox joy of a bridegroom on his wedding morning, though I am somewhat doubtful if joy be the sensation most in the foreground of even the happiest bridegroom, should he chance to possess a nervous organization and a lively conscience. It is really no joke to see, as it were, the existence which is alone familiar, dwindle into a blue strip on the horizon of the past, a strip whose details memory may fill up, but whose actual scenes we shall never re-visit.

Once before had Frederick Godfrey cut his life in two; and the bitter sense of failure in the past which smote him now, was no encouraging augury for the future. All that he had once believed in, and been so proud to possess—learning, logic, the eye to

see, the heart to feel, he had found useless to furnish the missing link, the needful fact, which had power to unite the human with the divine. He had sought in vain for that which is higher than nature, and not contrary to it.

After all his study, and all his honours, like any common waif or stray of humanity, he had been borne on the waves of passion, and driven by the breath of accident towards that dim coast of the future which loomed like an Arctic island through the Polar fogs; now seen, now gone; and on which the next turn of the tide might dash him in ruin and despair.

"I have done all you wished me, have I not, Frederick?" was poor Elfrida's not unnatural petition for a little notice and approbation.

"My darling, you have done all and

everything you could do, and you are dearer to me than words can tell."

A bright smile rippled over her face, like a wave of light, and her eyes darkened with joy. It was the supreme moment of her beauty, as of her happiness. The poor child was one of those, not so few in number, to whom the whole tenor of a life is nothing as a proof of love, in comparison with a few tender words.

In the long, lonely years of Frederick Godfrey's future life, that face was often present with him. It was his last and strongest impression of the beauty he had seen with wonder for the first time in the Sheldonian Theatre, long ago now, but never to be forgotten.

It was a wretched town church in which they were married, with great galleries along three sides, and tall and square pews,

like roofless cupboards, in the area. Several other couples—all poor people—were married at the same time. The clergyman wore a yellow, rumpled surplice, and hurried over the ceremony as quickly as possible. A male guest, belonging to one of the other parties, gave Elfrida away. Nothing of the kind could well be less solemn.

“We have nothing to fear now,” said Frederick Godfrey, as they were once more seated in the cab.

But though he said so, there was a weight on his spirits he could not shake off. Oh ! how dismal the world looked ; how drearily fell the rain ; how the eaves dripped, and how the dark, sooty foliage of the city trees rotted away on the saturated earth ! They had reached the station, when he spoke again :

“Now I will take the tickets, and, in the meantime, you had better go to the platform. Many people know me by sight here, and till we are fairly away from Smokeham, it will perhaps be pleasanter for you, my darling, to be seen with me as little as possible. Never mind the luggage. I will see to everything.”

In ready obedience, Elfrida wandered on to the platform. It was a very large station, and the booking-office to which Frederick had gone was at some distance. She had not proceeded many paces when she suddenly found herself confronted by Mr. Summerwood and one of the Nunfield sisters.

He placed himself right in her path. His countenance was severe and determined.

“Miss Foxley!” he said; and she looked up white with fear. A feeling of guilt, she

did not know why, took possession of her timid soul.

“ Frederick !—Frederick !” she cried, looking wildly round.

“ Miss Foxley !—you do not hesitate openly to proclaim your own shame. How must you be fallen !”

“ You mistake,” she cried, with more spirit. “ He is my husband.”

“ Your husband ! Poor deluded girl, if you are deluded.” For such a sacrifice as Frederick Godfrey had made was altogether inconceivable to Mr. Summerwood, who at all times sought to make the best of both worlds. “ How can he be your husband ? A Romish priest ! I tell you, I warn you solemnly, you are betrayed to eternal perdition. The tortures of eternity await your miserable soul.”

Words, I have said, were to Elfrida all-

potent, and at this awful utterance she sent forth that piercing shriek which had startled Helen Godfrey and Leigh Wynford.

Helen had just reached the door of the refreshment-room, when, like a flash, Elfrida passed her, her eyes widening with increased terror as she beheld Leigh Wynford. To her bewildered senses it seemed that she must after all be guilty, and that the avengers of her sins were upon her; that God had taken Frederick from her.

“Elfrida!—Elfrida!” cried Helen, trying to seize her dress. But the panic-stricken girl twitched it out of her grasp, and fled deliriously down the long station.

“Save me! save me! oh, Frederick!”

But no Frederick was there. Only Mr. Summerwood, who called out in a loud, commanding voice,

“Stop the young lady! It is a case of

abduction—a Romish priest! We are her friends.”

As these words smote like the voice of Doom on the ears of the fugitive, she only fled the faster.

The platform terminated at the mouth of the tunnel by which the trains entered the station. The level of the rails was two or three feet below that of the platform. Here she turned for an instant, like an animal at bay, then jumped down, running wildly under the arch.

Suddenly there was a shout from the few porters on duty at that early hour.

“The train! the train!” And every creature rushed in the direction of the tunnel.

A sudden sickness; a vision of men like trees walking; one terror-stricken face looking out from the rear of the ghost-like crowd; a sound like the roar of a cataract; a horror

and darkness as of death ; and Helen Godfrey was spared the sight, which none who then beheld it were ever able to forget.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## DULCE DOMUM.

THE window of the breakfast-room at Thorleigh Court opened on the lawn. It was open now to admit the soft, still air of a fine October morning. Within and without the picture which presented itself was full of colour and beauty. Why, one is tempted to ask, is it that so many things in this world reserve their culminating brilliancy for the period that immediately precedes departure? The flushed cheek and brightened eye of the consumptive girl, the

glory of sunset skies, the glowing colours of the Autumn flowers, and the pomp of Autumn woods, seem only bestowed to usher in the cold pallor of death.

The flower-beds in the lawn at Thorleigh Court flashed like gems of crimson, and gold, and purple, in a setting of emerald green. Still as a dream were the yellow leaves on the twin elm-trees on the slope beyond ; and the note of the robin, accompanied by the fall of the stream, came pleasantly to the ear through the windless atmosphere. One could just see the glitter of the waters in the pathetic brilliancy of the October sunshine, which always looks as if it ought to shine on graves.

The interior, too, was pretty, with a beauty suggestive of the peace, and plenty, and refinement of English domestic life. A small but blazing fire ; a bookcase full of

well-bound books; dark, polished furniture, good, but not fine; the whitest of tablecloths; the brightest of silver; fresh flowers of the richest tints; were among the main features which produced at once that harmony of colouring and moral association.

Mrs. Wynford was pouring out tea, Mr. Wynford helping himself to some dish upon the table. They did not like to have servants waiting at breakfast.

"I wonder if I shall have a letter from Helen this morning," said Mrs. Wynford. "Poor girl! she has not written to me since this terrible affair of her brother."

"Lady Page wrote by her request," Mr. Wynford spoke shortly, as if the matter were painful to him. A pause ensued.

"Ah! everybody has his own griefs," Mrs. Wynford remarked at last; and the remark seemed to annoy her husband more

by its truth than its triteness. A cloud came over his countenance. The whole affair, indeed, had been very painful to him. He knew more of it than his wife. She only knew what Lady Page had chosen to communicate. He had read the report of the coroner's inquest in the newspapers, and knew who the unfortunate girl really was.

Immediately on reading it, he had put the paper into the fire, lest it should meet his wife's eye, though she was no great reader of newspapers. Poor Mr. Wynford dreaded her talk and her reminiscences, and her general effusiveness. Long as he had known her, he had never understood how to her, and, indeed, to a large class of people, talk is the safety-valve for feelings with which, without that outlet, the heart might burst. Neither could he understand that vanity of

woe, which, when she had no other vanity, was now always ready for her to fall back upon.

“It is better for us, my dear,” he said, “to look at our own duties than at anybody’s griefs. Let the deeds of the wrongdoer as much as possible terminate with himself.”

He set his lips firmly. Talk always realized the past to Mr. Wynford. It was only by banishing it that he could “fill his position ;” and this required a constant and sustained effort.

Mr. and Mrs. Wynford were wholly ignorant of the diagnosis of each other’s minds, yet long habit had taught the latter, at least, the treatment required by certain symptoms.

So her face brightened up. She poured out the tea in a brisk, effective manner, and

began to tell how splendidly Mrs. Cribbs had said the turkeys were turning out, with an episode concerning the delinquencies of the turkey-cock, who had devoured a duckling, and been condemned to solitary confinement in a wire netting as a punishment.

Mr. Wynford smiled approbation. He liked such babble, whether he listened or not. It gave him the idea of good spirits and good humour, and these were the two qualities, in connection with good looks, which had originally won his heart.

He had not indeed expected good spirits in the first days of their affliction. Then, he had known it was his duty to strengthen and support the "weaker vessel." But long ere now of course things had returned, or ought to have returned, to their normal condition.

"Here comes the post at last!" he said, as the servant brought the letter-bag into the room; "and no letter from Helen, I am sorry to say."

"No letter from Helen?"

"No letter at all, only some of those invitations to dishonest speculation, the mere advertising of which must involve the ruin of thousands. Here are the newspapers, which you may like to see, a pamphlet, and a packet which looks like business, though what business it can be now, I cannot conjecture."

Laying down the newspapers and advertisements, he opened the business packet, and a number of papers, with the aspect of bills and deeds, dropped out. Mrs. Wyntford did not care much for business, and was just tearing off the cover of the "Times," when her practised eye discerned

a change in her husband's countenance. He did not frown, or grow pale, or tremble, or look excited : the reticent nature of Mr. Wynford was not prone to any such demonstrations ; but his lips were set, and there was a look of constraint ever so slight on his forehead, which she understood, and knew to be the indication of unusual mental disturbance.

Only her countenance asked, "What is it?" Effusive as she was, she knew that on such occasions it was not always well to be inquisitive.

He looked her full in the face. His lips parted, and he seemed to try to speak. He grasped at her hand.

"Henry !—Henry ! what is the matter?" As she looked at him, for the first time in all their united life, she saw that there were tears in his eyes.

“Joy!” he said; “great——” But his dry, nervous lips refused to form another word.

He put a letter, which had been with the papers in the packet, open into her hand. At the first sight of the handwriting she began to tremble all over, and the words danced before her eyes. She threw herself into her husband’s arms.

“Henry!—Henry, you said it was joy!”

He clasped her and strained her to his heart with a passion and ecstasy unknown even to the days of their early love.

“He has paid all,” he said. “Our boy!”

Poor parents! From that time the joy in heaven over the returned prodigal, rather than over the ninety-nine properly conducted, was no mystery to them.

Surely, what is most human is also most divine.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the evening of that same day, as the russet and yellow of the October woods took on yet warmer hues and richer tints, in the crimson light of the stillest of Autumn evenings, Leigh Wynford sat on a garden seat on the lawn in front of the old Jacobean mansion, into which he had brought to-day a greater happiness even than on the day when, as son and heir, he first opened his eyes on the world. His mother sat holding his left hand, as if she could not quit him for a moment. His right was suspended in a sling. He looked pale and grave, yet happy; with a happiness which seemed too deep to overflow in outward demonstration. Mr. Wynford was standing in the library window, with a book in his hand; but he was not looking at the book.

Mrs. Wynford's tongue was loosened now; but she was listening as well as talking. Her talk, indeed, was chiefly a gush of questions, interlarded with exclamations of admiration for her son, and gratitude towards all who had been kind to him.

She "would go to Smokeham immediately to thank Mrs. Higginson in person, she would have her to stay with her, she should be her sister, her dearest friend if she dropped as many h's in an hour as would cover an edition of the 'Times' newspaper. As for Mr. Higginson, if he wanted to stand for the county—ah! there was the rub! She fervently hoped he would not want to stand for the county; but, any way, they could and would support Sir Anthony Hayward." So Mrs. Wynford ran on in the intervals of her son's narrative, not without some pleasure of a quite personal character

at the prospect of patronising Mrs. Higginson, and the respect and delight she should inspire in that kind-hearted, parvenue woman. She was arranging, too, in her busy mind, the terms in which she would relate all the details just learned to her husband; for she well knew that, except upon the substantial facts, father and son would have no communication.

At last, after a short pause, Leigh asked, and a fine ear might have noticed a slight difference in his accent,

“You have not heard from Miss Godfrey since——”

“No. I suppose she has been too much occupied, poor girl, with her own——”

“No, I do not think it is altogether that, mother.” And Leigh laid his head on her breast and looked at her with the old coaxing face of his boyhood, the strongest assur-

ance that he knew he was pardoned. "For my sake, you must write to her, and tell her you will be glad to have her for a daughter."

Mrs. Wynford uttered a cry of delight, and starting up, ran open-mouthed to the library window.

"Henry—dearest Henry—only think, Leigh wants to marry Helen. Is it not delightful? I am so pleased, Henry! And we shall have them both to live with us always. Dear husband!—dear children!"

The good middle-aged woman nearly danced in her rapture.

"My dear!" said the Squire. He only smiled quietly, but it is possible that he was as happy as his wife.

Leigh, it may be supposed, was happy too—as happy as he could be with the

shadow of that still recent tragedy on his heart.

But there was one item in his mother's expressions of thankfulness which added to a difficulty he already felt. But not yet would he even by a word lessen the fulness of that first burst of happiness.

How good they were to be so happy! Father's love—mother's love! Are they not a standing witness to the nature of that love which is Divine?

He had been a fortnight at home. His arm, which had been hurt in a vain effort to save Elfrida on that frightful morning, was well again. He had gone with his father into the woods which stretched away on the heights behind the house, to mark some trees for felling. It was a breezy Autumn morning, and the air was bright

and crisp. The fallen leaves rustled dry under the feet, and the squirrels gambolled among the half-stripped branches.

Most of the talking between Leigh and his father was done by the former ; but he had been unusually silent this morning. His father had observed it, and mentally imputed it to a letter he had had at breakfast-time from Marshborough.

“So Helen thinks she must remain with her mother till the Spring?” he said.

“Yes,” Leigh answered, somewhat abstractedly.

“Well, my boy, she is right. We must not blame her for being a good daughter, and six months will soon pass.”

“I don’t blame her. I could not ask her—I could hardly wish her to do otherwise.”

“Perhaps by and by we may be able to

induce Mrs. Godfrey to come here ; and any way, you can go often to see her."

"As often as business will permit."

The Squire turned round and almost stared at his son.

"Business !—what business ?"

"You know, father, I am Mr. Higginson's partner."

"But, of course, you are going to give all that up now ?"

"I do not wish to do so." He spoke firmly, but with much respect. The Squire did not answer, but his son could see that he was greatly disturbed.

"You are not displeased ?" he asked gently.

"I am disappointed, Leigh, that the vulgar love of gain should seem to you preferable to filling the honourable position which is yours by birth and education."

“Oh, father!”

“Well, then, what is it, if it is not that? Are you not happy at home?”

“Happy! Oh! father, you and my mother are——” Leigh stopped. He could pour out his heart in speech to his mother, but with his father it was different. After an instant’s pause, he added, “But I have a man’s work to do in the world.”

“Granted. But has a man no other work but to make paper bags and speculate in collieries? Can a man’s work not be also a gentleman’s?”

“I should be sorry, indeed, if mine were not a gentleman’s.”

“Look here, Leigh—any honest work is better than debt. I am—proud that you should have had the true gentlemanly feeling to think so. If you had paid your debts by working as a navvy, I should have

thought the same. But now that you have re-instated yourself in your natural position, let me ask you, is there no work attached to that? Has landed property no duties? Or, like trade, is it all a mere matter of bargain and sale, and doing the best for ourselves?"

"That is exactly what I think trade ought not to be. Trades Unions, and now Agricultural Unions, what are they but the commencement of a frightful internecine war? Everywhere I see class rising up against class, even sex against sex, till the whole fabric of social existence seems about to be dissolved into a mere aggregate of hostile atoms, which have lost their cohesive power—the house divided against itself—which cannot stand!"

"True, true, my boy!" agreed the Squire.  
"I am glad, at least, that you do not think

all this misery is 'progress,' and that all who try to stop the course of the universal selfishness which people call their 'rights,' are mere 'obstructives,' as the fashionable political slang phrases it. But to tell you the truth, I do not quite understand what you are aiming at." Now Leigh was quite prepared for his father's not understanding, seeing that the Squire's notions of a young man's career lay in quite conventional grooves. "Have you no ambition?"

"No ambition! Oh! father, I am very ambitious. My ambition—I almost feel it to be audacious—is to help to unite the divided house."

The Squire looked at his son's flushed face, half puzzled, half admiring. He was certainly not quite the orthodox young Squire he had once trusted to see him, who would be exemplary in county business, heroic in

country sports, and stick inflexibly by the constitution in Parliament; neither did he seem to be the money-seeking, every-one-for-himself, vulgar man of the period he had, for one moment of dismay, feared he should find him. No wonder the Squire did not understand him. He belonged to that class, rather rare at all times, and rarest of all in this age of spasmodic endeavour and most unoriginal originality, a perfectly natural youth, who quite unconsciously possessed feelings and thoughts of his own.

A very realistic life had not cured Leigh Wynford of either the idealism or the romance of his old Oxford days. They had only taken another direction. Perhaps he was but a dreamer. But it is through such dreams the world is saved—when the dreamer has strength to convert his dreams into facts. And, after all, it is usually the

strong man who takes the advice of the poet,  
and

“Trusts to his heart, and what the world calls illusions.”

“In the good old times, Leigh,” said his father, “the house was not divided.”

“For the Romans were like brothers,  
In the brave days of old!”

Leigh quoted, with a smile. “But we cannot go back to the old days. The Nile and the Thames never run backwards. We must accept our own times, and make the best of them.”

“But if you are such a politician, why not go into Parliament, and say all this there.”

“Because I do not wish to say it. I wish to do it—a better thing!”

A better thing to work in a vulgar factory, and pass one's life among grimy “Hands,” than to speechify in Parliament, and dine

at luxurious clubs! Astounding idea! equally astounding to Mr. Wynford as it had been to Mr. Higginson; yet, against his own will, the Squire was impressed and carried away, as Mr. Higginson had already been impressed and carried away.

“Where did you find your persuasive tongue?” he said, with a sort of regretful pride.

“Neither through eloquence nor talent; I only took a second class, you know, but I try to appeal to what is good in people. That must be it, I think. Trade—business saved me. I owe it much. We are called a nation of shopkeepers. I should like to show that a nation of shopkeepers can be a nation of gentlemen, while they still stick to their shops. I have put my hand to the plough; dear father, I owe you much too—have I your leave not to turn back?”

After some seconds' silence the Squire asked gently :

“Do you think you will obtain your mother's permission?”

“I will do nothing without it. I hoped that you would obtain that for me.”

“And Helen?”

“Helen consents—more than consents. To tell you the truth, I believe at the first mention of living in Smokeham she was disappointed ; but when I had explained matters to her as I have to you, I think she was more eager than myself. Dear Helen!”

“Then if Helen consents,” said the Squire, “we must not be the ‘obstructives.’”

At that moment the good Squire felt more hopeful for the present world than he had done for many a year. Did not Leigh belong to the present?

Leigh had gone up to bed that night, and

was standing in the window of his room, when suddenly he felt his mother's arms round his neck, and her tears on his cheek.

“Best—dearest child!” she said, “you must do what you think right. You are so clever—and good—and will be a great man yet, I am sure.”

Then Leigh knew he had won his father too. In a paroxysm of gratitude, but with a slight twinge almost like remorse, he clasped her to his heart.

“I have the best mother in the world.”

When she joined her husband half an hour later, she said :

“After all, this will never be his home again while we live.”

And with a sigh she parted at last from the hope which had lighted her way through so many dark years. Nevertheless, she was a happy woman the next day, at the pros-

pect of presiding over the purchase of the house and furniture in Smokeham.

If life rarely fulfils our expectations, it sometimes provides very endurable substitutes for the good things at which they have pointed.

## CHAPTER XV.

## A LETTER FROM THE WEST.

IT was on a beautiful evening in May—quite an ideal May—a May without the cold grey sky and withering wind, the stern facts which nature so frequently opposes to the rose-coloured dreams and “ethereal mildness” of the poetic mind. But to-night the poetic dream really seemed as if it were not altogether imagination, but had some more substantial basis to rest upon.

The wind was soft, the sky was blue, the roses peeped in at the open windows, and

the "golden rain," as the Germans call it, of the laburnum, brightened like sunshine the green gloom of the shrubberies round Leigh Wynford's villa at Smokeham.

On a garden-chair on the lawn in front of the windows, sat Mrs. Godfrey, reading a long letter, with an American post-mark. Mrs. Godfrey was aged a good deal. Though her carriage was still upright and stately, her hair was almost white, her features were more lined, her complexion greyer, and her eyes had that milder light which one sees in the more genial forms of old age; as if the fruit had mellowed while it ripened, and the lesson that wisdom had learned from experience was, gentleness.

I do not mean, in this last chapter, which is intended to be the shortest, to inflict the whole letter upon the reader, as it might not interest him so much as it interested

Mrs. Godfrey. It was a letter from her son Frederick, and contained many personal details of his new home and new life, as the Principal of a newly-founded College in a new territory, which had just been erected into a new state of the American Union. He had described how what a few years ago had been a lonely wilderness of primæval forest, was now one of mankind's busiest haunts; how the mere prosaic human beings of the restless, practical West, turning into actual fact the wonders of the fabled genii of the dreamy, stationary East, had caused streets, churches, warehouses, docks, schools, to spring up and be peopled as if by magic. He wrote:—

“In this new, wonderful, intense life, I feel my old personality lost. My pulse quickens, my mind enlarges. I remember

in the old days, before we went to Marshborough, when I used to go with my father to the National School, we used to think, for the village children, there was no lesson so impressive as an object lesson. The Great Teacher puts colossal object lessons before me now, and I find it is only in his world we can understand his work; that the knowledge of what he would have us do is an inductive process, not a closet system; an ever-fresh application of the unchangeable truth, not the perpetuation of the old forms, which, though venerable as the walls of York or the towers of Conway, are for the times as practically useless.

“Dear mother, I am often present in spirit with you all in Smokeham. Now, in the Whitsun holidays, I can imagine the noisy joy of the boys, and their appreciation

of the fun of being uncles. I hope they won't kill our little nephew with their devotion. Does Helen trust them with the 'Son and Heir?' It is natural they should like Leigh. Like the best kind of men, he will always be a boy with boys. Ask Nelly to tell me every little domestic trifle. It is all I shall ever know of domestic life. But don't trouble about me. If it were not for one recollection, I am happier now than I have been since the old days in the Deanery.

“ ‘Oh! I see the crescent promise of my spirit hath not set,  
Ancient founts of inspiration well through all my fancy  
yet.’

“The pupils here are increasing fast. To the powers of some I trust a beneficent direction has been given. In this vast new world, with a future which seems almost boundless, what may not even one man do

for good or evil? I do not, I trust, forget I am a vowed servant of God, though I endeavour to fulfil my vocation in a way so widely different from what I expected. Tell Nelly and Leigh I cheer myself on by their example.

“ ‘Courage, Frederick! Failure teaches us to succeed.’ These were Leigh’s last words to me on board the Cunard steamer, and I have often recalled them since, as a sort of talisman to ward off despondency. How good he and Nelly were to me on that awful day. Thank you for the violets. They were sweet, like her memory. My heart longs for you—for you all.

“ Your grateful son,

“ F. J. G.”

The violets were from a grave in Smokeham cemetery. It was a low green mound,

with a narrow border of flowers, always carefully tended. On the stone at the head, was a date, and the inscription :—

ELFRIDA,

THE BELOVED WIFE OF

FREDERICK GODFREY.

THE END.

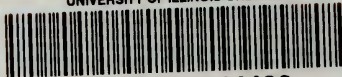








UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 069044490